ABSTRACT

WOODLAND JOURNEY:

A STUDY OF CHRISTIAN PILGRIMAGE

by

William Arthur Allen

While serving two small United Methodist churches in western New York state, I realized most people spent their time and energy focused on priorities that implied their core sense of identity as spouses, parents, or workers rather than as children of God. A previous pilgrimage on the Appalachian Trail encouraged me to ground my identity as a child of God, temporarily sojourning in this world while knowing that my true home is eternity. I wondered if Christians might better understand their true identity if they intentionally practiced the spiritual discipline of going on pilgrimage.

The purpose of this research project was to study the impact of a three-day pilgrimage experience on the participants' understandings of their Christian identity in relation to life choices of creating time and space to encounter God. I designed a twenty-seven mile journey through a beautiful state park ending at a Roman Catholic monastery. Participants completed questionnaires prior to and subsequent to the pilgrimage. I recorded observations during the pilgrimage as a participant observer, and I interviewed each participant approximately six weeks after the pilgrimage. I used triangulation to analyze the qualitative data.

The study demonstrated that pilgrimage increased most participants' understanding of Christian identity, and most participants modified life choices to create more time and space to encounter God.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled

WOODLAND JOURNEY:

A STUDY OF CHRISTIAN PILGRIMAGE

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A Dissertation

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Dissertation writing is a pilgrimage of its own kind. I offer my great thanks to God and to all who walked this particular journey with me.

CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM

In the summer of 1989, I stood next to a three-sided shelter on the Appalachian Trail in northern New Jersey, pondering what to do with the rest of my life. I groaned inwardly, thinking of the difficult day I had just completed while leading a wilderness experience program for needy youth. I had recently graduated from college, and, somewhat disillusioned with academia, I felt unsure of my future plans. I also tired of the petty, adolescent squabbles I had monitored all day. In that moment, I thoroughly craved any new adventure that might come my way. By the grace of God, a young man emerged quietly from the woods and greeted me with a pleasant word. As I spoke with him, I learned he was hiking the Appalachian Trail from Georgia to Maine. Somewhere in the ensuing conversation I embraced a similar dream. Little did I know how it would change my life.

The next March I set off, hiking approximately 2,200 miles through fourteen states, three seasons, six pairs of boots, and ninety-six boxes of macaroni and cheese. The experience transformed me. People often asked me afterwards to clarify what made this journey so special. Answers to that question, of course, did not come easily. Obvious responses included the great sense of accomplishment, the fantastic cardiovascular conditioning, the deep appreciation for natural beauty, and the wonderful people. Less obviously, I had discovered the value of simple living, the freedom of a transformed prayer life (from formulaic to conversational in manner), and the release from a deep inner *angst* that had plagued me for months.

Friends assumed my hike served as a wonderful opportunity to plan the rest of my life. After all, I had received an excellent education, and I looked forward to a future of numerous possibilities. An extended backpacking trip would provide me the occasion to organize my dreams. Instead, I found an incredible release from the anxiety and frantic pace of modern life. Arranging my future seemed discordant with the ethos of hiking. In a culture dominated by doing, the hike schooled me in the beauty of being. The mental fog that obscured the peace of a life lived in God's grace seemed to clear away. Just as people whose lives have been saved from certain death often believe they have been given a second chance, I sensed that my life was changed forever because I had traveled with God on a holy pilgrimage. The hike served as a tangible metaphor for the journey of life all humans experience as sojourners in this world. After completing this powerful experience, I found leaving the peacefulness of the mountains and returning to the frantic pace of Western culture especially difficult.

Seven years later, I embarked upon an eight-year co-pastorate with my wife, Kristen, in two small United Methodist churches in western New York state. The parishioners were kind and caring people who welcomed us into their communities. We settled into the pastoral duties, started a family, and gradually incorporated ourselves into the rhythm of small town American life. As time passed, I became deeply aware of just how fast-paced that rhythm was. The frantic rate at which people lived left little time for rest and reflection. The anxious demands of growing families, coupled with high expectations for entertainment, comfort, and community service left faithful people scrambling simply to get to church on Sunday. With priorities such as these, time to give toward living a contemplative life simply did not exist.

I responded to people's frantic lifestyles by preaching on finding freedom through the practice of spiritual disciplines. I attempted to woo my parishioners with the offer of a less frenetic, more peaceful life. I noted that, aside from some habits of consumption that rightly needed curbing, most church attendees wisely had chosen positive activities with which to fill their lives. I suggested, however, that these activities were simply too numerous and incorrectly prioritized. I freely acknowledged that I was also sorely tempted to try to fit more activities into my schedule. Kristen and I had set specific boundaries around consuming, working, and serving, but we still struggled not to breach those boundaries daily. As I reflected on this manic existence being lived out in my congregation every week, I realized that the one experience to which I constantly returned to remind myself of God's priorities in this world was my Appalachian Trail journey.

During this season in my life, I began to view my hike as a pilgrimage. I knew that most people neither wanted to nor could afford to spend six months walking through the mountains. I wondered, however, what might occur if they intentionally practiced the spiritual discipline of going on a pilgrimage for three days. Perhaps Christians might gain a healthier perspective on their own journey of life if they temporarily set aside the myriad of less-than-important tasks clogging their calendars. Charles E. Hummel calls these nagging cares the "tyranny of the urgent" (12). I entertained the premise that taking time out of a frantic lifestyle to participate in a pilgrimage experience, which included discussions on the theology of the pilgrim identity, might serve to remind Christians of their identity as children of God called to join the greater journey of faith in which God is the central pilgrim. Theoretically, the more people understand that their identity is

grounded in their relationship with God, the more likely they will not feel obligated to fill their lives with the stress of multiple activities in order to produce accomplishments upon which to build their identities.

I sensed my perspective on the unhealthy nature of the pace of Western culture was correct, but I had nothing more than my experience to back me up. Doctoral work at Asbury Theological Seminary later confirmed my intuition about the frenetic tempo of the West. I discovered in my reading that the frantic lifestyle of America has been recognized by others. William A. Dyrness notes that Americans are always a people in a hurry. Even American language usage reflects this attitude. People are "under the gun," "facing a deadline," and "pressed for time" (52). Christians live lives no less frantic than their non-Christian neighbors. The schedule may be packed with church meetings and other Christian duties, but nonetheless, it is completely full (57).

Americans feel the need to keep busy because *doing* is of ultimate significance. One of the first questions asked of a new acquaintance is, "What do you do?" The importance of achieving visible accomplishments dominates virtually all aspects of American life (Kluckhohn 17). Americans believe that one is what one does. Americans also believe that the foundation of fulfillment is achievement (Stewart and Bennett 76). Personal success is measured by one's income and the ability to accumulate multiple possessions (Dyrness 53).

This obsession with *doing* is in stark contrast to other societies throughout history. R. Paul Stevens notes that the ancient Greeks viewed work with disdain. Work itself was called "unleisure." Unemployment was considered good fortune and allowed a person to enjoy what the Greeks believed to be the truly important aspects of existence: philosophy,

politics, and the contemplative life (110). Although the Greeks' denigration of work revealed an undesirable, extreme view, it also discloses the reality that North American attitudes are not the norm for all cultures. Richard D. Brown notes that the idea of being thrifty with one's time did not become pervasive until the Virginia Company recognized the potential productivity of organizing workers into shifts in order to maximize the profitability of tobacco in colonial Jamestown in the 1620s. Earlier attitudes concerning the discipline of work did not prioritize hourly output and required only four hours of labor a day (43-44).

A frantic pace and an overemphasis on constant achievement create an American lifestyle that generates stress. Richard Trubo notes that death and taxes are no longer the only sure things in life. The inevitable reality of stress dominates the lives of most people (26). Richard A. Swenson makes this profound claim about modern American society: "No one in the history of humankind has ever had to live with the stressors we have acting upon us today. They are unprecedented. The human spirit is called upon to withstand pressures that have never before been encountered" (62).

In contrast to the prevailing North American mind-set, Christian identity is found in being declared the "children of God" (1 John 3:1, NIV). Jesus calls believers to follow him and sojourn in the land in preparation for the final consummation of the kingdom of heaven. God calls Christians to walk the journey of faith, just as the patriarchs, ancient Israel, the early disciples, and the Church down through the ages have done. The faith journey is a small part of God's greater journey, which includes a constant movement toward fulfillment. Believers do not need to earn their way on this path through productivity and accomplishment. Christians travel the pilgrimage of life simply because

they are human beings made in the image of God and called by God to become like him through the action of God's powerful Holy Spirit.

Christian identity is grounded in relationship with God. American Christians, however, live frantic lifestyles based not on their status as children of God, but on their assumption that identity originates from what they accomplish. The constant activity and frenetic pace leave little opportunity to nurture one's relationship with God. In contrast, my Appalachian Trail pilgrimage served as a tangible experience that taught me to prioritize what was most important and leave behind the rest, whether good or bad. The hike helped me in everyday life to cut out unnecessary activity and create time and space to encounter God. In Jesus Christ, God himself embraced pilgrimage when he embarked upon the great journey of human life in order to renew his relationship with humankind. Perhaps pilgrimage is a tool for shaping Christians by reconnecting them with spiritually healthy understandings of Christian identity and life choices. I am interested, therefore, in exploring what impact a short-term pilgrimage experience might produce in American Christians from my home region of western New York state.

Purpose

The purpose of this research project was to study the impact of a three-day pilgrimage experience on the participants' understandings of their Christian identity in relation to life choices of creating time and space to encounter God.

Research Questions

In order to fulfill the purpose of this study, two research questions were identified.

Research Question #1

How did the participants describe their awareness of God and/or relationship with God before, during, and after the pilgrimage experience?

Research Question #2

What was the self-identified level of stress in the participants before, during, and after the pilgrimage experience?

Definition of Terms

In this study, the principal terms were defined in the following manner.

A *pilgrimage experience* is an intentional, physical journey beginning in a typical setting of the pilgrim's life and ending at a meaningful spiritual destination. The pilgrimage experience serves as a metaphor for the greater spiritual journey of the pilgrim's life. Pilgrimage experiences often involve the following: a time of disconnection from the larger culture, immersion in a natural setting, physical exertion, freedom from family and work obligations, companions with whom to share the journey, and stops along the way involving worship and contemplation.

Christian identity, as I define it in this research project, is the understanding that Christian persons are fundamentally defined through their relationships with God. Christians' awareness of God and/or relationships with God reflect upon their Christian identity. Christians ground their self-worth and importance in their status as children of God who are called to follow Jesus Christ. All other means of self-identification, including family of origin, nationality, occupation, place of residence, natural talents, acquired skills, physical appearance, possessions, honors, and academic degrees, are secondary to this foundational understanding.

Life choices refer to repetitive behavioral patterns undertaken by human beings. All people intentionally choose to participate in numerous, daily activities that shape them as persons. People make certain life choices because of preexisting beliefs about being human. For example, Christians intentionally participate in corporate worship because of their beliefs concerning God's role as the creator, redeemer, and sustainer of the world. People also make life choices because they believe the activities will shape them as persons. For example, Christians read the Bible because they believe interaction with Scripture brings them into closer relationship with God. Thus, life choices both influence and are influenced by human understandings of identity. Life choices also influence the amount of stress in peoples' lives. Life choices concerning self-care practices (e.g., proper sleep, nutritious diet, consistent exercise, sufficient time off from work) produce direct implications for stress.

Ministry Intervention

The ministry intervention consisted of eleven participants spending three days and three nights in May 2007 hiking a twenty-seven mile route from the southern end of Letchworth State Park located in Portageville, New York, to the Abbey of the Genesee located in Piffard, New York. Participants disengaged from their links to society and spent time hiking, relaxing, reflecting, talking, listening, singing, worshiping, and doing chores together.

I facilitated the pilgrimage experience by giving directions, leading discussions, teaching about pilgrimage (see Appendixes D and F), providing timelines, and coordinating logistics. Participants hiked a prescribed number of miles per day and spent their evenings together in park cabins and at the guest house at the Abbey of the Genesee.

The rhythm of the daily pilgrimage schedule included the following: breakfast at 8:00 a.m., a gathering time in which participants received a talk about pilgrimage and logistics for the day, hiking time all day, supper at 5:00 p.m., an evening gathering in which participants discussed thoughts and impressions about their experiences, and bed time at 10:00 p.m.

Context

The pilgrimage experience occurred in rural, western New York state. Participants walked the length of Letchworth State Park and then continued on the Genesee Valley Greenway until they reached the Abbey of the Genesee. Letchworth State Park straddles the Genesee River for fifteen miles as the river cuts a beautiful gorge through the landscape. The Genesee Valley Greenway is a hiking path built on a railroad bed that originally was the towpath of the Genesee Valley Canal system. The Abbey of the Genesee is a Roman Catholic monastery in the Cistercian Trappist tradition. The Abbey contains a stunning sanctuary where people are welcomed to join the monks in prayers, which occur seven times daily. The monks also house pilgrims in three guesthouses on the Abbey's property.

Western New York state is an isolated region of rural, northern Appalachia. Except for Buffalo and Rochester, the residents of western New York live in small cities, rural villages, and isolated farms and homesteads. The vast majority of residents are racially Caucasian. Although most residents are Protestant, a large Roman Catholic influence exists in this region. Residents of western New York tend to be friendly and amicable to anyone who is not perceived to be an outside threat. Residents also tend to carry a parochial outlook and worldview, cherishing values promoting stability and

continuity within the status quo. Residents value family systems and community life. Identity is deeply associated with occupations and hard work. Residents tend to be very busy juggling work, entertainment, and family obligations. Children's activities dominate family schedules. Residents carry a utilitarian attitude toward many activities. Experiences not pragmatic in nature are often devalued and considered inefficient.

Methodology

The methodology used for this research was an evaluative study that was descriptive in nature. The study focused on recording the impact of a pilgrimage experience on a specific group of participants.

Participants

The participants for this study were self-identified Christians from western New York state. Five men and six women voluntarily joined in the pilgrimage experience. All eleven participants were actively recruited from churches affiliated with the Western New York Conference of the United Methodist Church and from churches of other denominations with which I had connections. Participants ranged in age from 29 to 56 years old.

Instrumentation

Instrumentation used to collect data included an initial questionnaire as part of the registration process, an after-event questionnaire with open-ended questions, personal interviews with each participant four to six weeks subsequent to the pilgrimage, and observations I made while acting as a participant observer.

Variables

The independent variable in this study was the participation in the pilgrimage experience. The dependent variable in this study was the participants' understandings of their Christian identity in relation to life choices of creating time and space to encounter God.

I anticipated the pilgrimage experience would produce within the participants new paradigms through which to assess their lives. I assumed the length of time needed to complete the pilgrimage experience and the disconnection with the larger culture by not having access to cell phones, computers, and rapid transportation would help the participants gain insights into the frantic pace of their North American lifestyles. I also assumed the natural setting, the destination involving a spiritually meaningful place, the daily linear journey, the physical exertion, the stories shared, the sleeping arrangements in cabins, the campfires, the freedom from family and work obligations, the companionship while walking, the worship times, the stops along the way, the talks about pilgrimage, and the shared meals would all contribute to an opening of the participants' perspectives concerning their relationship with God and the prioritization of activities in their daily lives.

Data Collection

Participants completed the registration questionnaires immediately following the submission of their applications. Participants completed the closing questionnaires on the final day at the Abbey prior to leaving. At the end of each day, and with the aid of my two logistics helpers, I handwrote observations noted during that day's pilgrimage experience. I coded these notes at a later date for organizational purposes. I conducted

personal interviews with each participant four to six weeks after the pilgrimage experience. I typed the information from these interviews into my personal computer as the interview occurred. I coded these written interview notes at a later date in order to organize them into the data. The interviews occurred in the participants' homes or at a meeting point near to their places of residence.

Data Analysis

All data gathered for this research study was qualitative in nature. I analyzed the content of the data in order to ascertain similar trends in participants' answers. I organized the data into a coded framework in order to draw conclusions concerning the impact of the pilgrimage experience on the participants' lives more easily.

Delimitations and Generalizability

The delimitations of this study were substantial. The five men and six women who participated came from western New York state, which includes the northernmost geographical area of rural Appalachia. Participants identified themselves as Christians; therefore, even though pilgrimage is a universal concept found in numerous religions, this study delimits the impact of pilgrimage to a Christian perspective. Participants voluntarily paid $100 per person to experience the pilgrimage, which potentially excluded those for whom $100 would entail an economic hardship. Participants hiked twenty-seven miles in three days, thus excluding those for whom physical limitations would not allow this type of activity. The findings may not be generalizable to a wider population because of the small number of participants and the specific pool from which they came, but, despite various limitations, the findings provide guidelines from which to draw some conclusions about the impact of a pilgrimage experience.

Overview of Study

Chapter 2 of this work establishes the biblical, theological, and historical context of the proposed study. The research design is presented in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 reports the research findings. Chapter 5 provides a summary and interpretation of the research findings as well as suggestions for further inquiry.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE

Biblical and Theological Reflection

The idea of the journey of faith has deep roots in Christianity and many other religions. Those who journey are always those who seek something more than what they currently have. Journeyers intentionally move out from the homeland, leave the familiar behind, and embark on a new path. Risk exists, which would not be present had the well-known places been cherished above the opportunity to experience new contexts. People commence journeying for different reasons.

Sometimes the journey thrusts itself upon a person. The Hebrew patriarch Joseph, obviously against his will, was sold into slavery at the hands of his jealous brothers (Gen. 37). Joseph had no choice. One day he was the favored son of his father, living a moderately privileged life, and the next he was cruelly bound and walking the many miles to Egypt.

Sometimes journeyers intimately join together with another person who has decided to follow God to a new place. Sarah and Lot, the family members of Abraham, represent this group (Gen. 12:5). The biblical text offers no indication that change of location is of any value to them. They simply followed Abraham along a new path. In many ways, Sarah is an archetype for millions of other women who, down through the ages, have followed their husbands to new locations with very little say in the matter.

Other journeyers willingly set out of their own free will. They respond to an inner call, which they may or may not recognize as the voice of God, to begin something new. They deliberately participate in the journeying process, and yet, especially in the

Christian tradition, theologians assert that the traveler is not the initiator of the movement. In the opening paragraph of his book *Confessions*, Saint Augustine famously speaks of the natural human condition of longing for God. “The thought of you [God] stirs him [the human] so deeply that he cannot be content unless he praises you, because you made us for yourself and our hearts find no peace until they rest in you” (21). The restless traveler responds to the inner heart-cry for God, which God, the initiator, has placed in every person’s heart. Jesus reminds his disciples in John 15:16 that they did not choose him but that he chose them and appointed them to go produce lasting fruit. Although the disciples were not forced to follow Jesus in his new path, neither were they the ones who proposed the process in the first place. Patricia D. Brown notes, “Every pilgrimage begins with a call from God. It is always personal, for it is an invitation to go deeper into the fullness of Christ” (69). God is always the initiator of Christian faith journeys.

The word “pilgrimage” comes from the Latin *peregrinus*, which means “stranger.” In discussing the words “stranger,” “sojourner,” and “alien,” the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (ISBE) notes that English translations show very little consistency in distinguishing between them. After a detailed look at four Hebrew words, which all translate to the terms noted above, the ISBE observes that, despite some particular nuances, the meanings overlap considerably (Block 563). Thus, to be a pilgrim is to be a stranger, a sojourner, an alien in a foreign land.

P. Brown describes pilgrimage as a process where the two paths of the physical and the spiritual are deeply interconnected. The pilgrim is the wanderer who reaches for abundance from God, despite the difficulties encountered along the journey. Having left

home behind, the pilgrim discovers a new home: the journey itself (69-70). P. Brown speaks of pilgrimage as inclusive of a physical journey. Although pilgrimage often does include geographical movement, believers also describe pilgrimage as a metaphor for the Christian life and even the journey of life in general. Tom Wright notes that, for the Christian, baptism is the place where all pilgrimage starts (30). “The very meaning of baptism is precisely that you have set out on a pilgrim path, following Jesus in the way of the cross. That is who you are, by definition” (32). Thus, the pilgrim path may never involve any type of physical movement to a new location. The metaphor, however, remains strong and is used prolifically throughout texts dealing with the Christian life.

In reference to physical pilgrimages that people embark upon for spiritual growth, Wright describes both the power and the limitations of pilgrimage. Holy places (such as the Temple mount in Jerusalem) can act as a healthy reminder of the greater reality of God’s presence in the world, or they can become a distraction from that very reality. Wright warns his readers never to fall victim of mistaking the signposts for the greater reality. He notes that Matthew 28:6 reveals the “double edge of pilgrimage” (17). While the angel invited the women at Jesus’ tomb to come and see where he lay, the holiness of this sacred gravesite was held in check by the reality that Jesus was not there. He had risen (17).

The Bible contains numerous stories involving movement and journeying. In fact, the biblical text as a whole intensely concerns itself with relating God’s plan for a world constantly involved in a process of movement toward fulfillment. God initiated this plan and put the entire process into motion at the creation of the world. Motivated by love, God started an event that is progressive in nature. The cosmos does not remain the same.

Everything constantly changes. Everyone and everything participates in the journey of life. The text makes clear that this journey has both a beginning and an end. The book of Revelation records the final consummation of the ages when Christ returns in glory to establish his permanent kingdom with the new heaven and the new earth.

With the advent of sin, severe harm came to the journey of the entire world. Filled with sadness, God thrust Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden to tread the path of the consequences of rebellion. Noah saw that path almost destroy the human race. He and his family escaped by God's grace to begin afresh. Soon, however, humans once again wandered in their own way. At Babel, God dispersed the nations, and the journey of humanity became multiple journeys spread across the world.

The pilgrim Abraham followed God into an unknown land. Isaac and Jacob remained wanderers who lived in tents and traveled extensively. As well, Jacob sojourned in his Uncle Laban's house for many years. Joseph eventually brought the family to Egypt where the scene was set for one of Israel's most defining moments. The exodus from Egypt emerged as a sojourn of immense magnitude. The ramifications of this movement of a nation to the Promised Land of Canaan still affect the Jewish people, and even the entire world, to this day. The Hebrew people left behind the fleshpots and slavery of Egypt to face the uncertainty of the wilderness. There, the Israelites doubted God's provision, and the Lord deemed necessary a forty-year hiatus to prepare them to enter the Promised Land.

The taking of the land revealed itself as a journey. God rendered to each tribe a certain parcel. In return, each tribe, with the help of the others, extracted the Canaanites in order to claim its inheritance. Hundreds of years later, the Israelites began a journey of

moving from a theocracy to a monarchy. Against the advice of Samuel, they insisted upon having a king and, sadly, reaped the benefits of that path in a few short years. The road of monarchy brought splendor under Solomon but quickly disintegrated into civil war. With the eventual loss of the northern tribes of Israel to the Assyrians, only Judah continued the salvation journey. Though the movement involved great pain and suffering, God allowed Judah's eventual exile to Babylon because of the continual idolatry of the Hebrews. God revealed the redemptive nature of his character when, seventy years later, he initiated a call to a remnant of Jews to embark on a new journey to return to Judah and rebuild Jerusalem.

Four hundred years later, God himself undertook the ultimate pilgrimage in the Incarnation. The Word, the second person of the Trinity, became human in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. He traveled as a mendicant teacher who preached, healed, and declared the reality of the kingdom of heaven come to this world. Jesus' first journey on earth ended with his death, resurrection, and ascension into glory. Under the power of the Holy Spirit, the apostles spread out from Jerusalem, journeying to the furthest nations with the gospel. In his missionary travels, Paul embodied the archetype of those who spread the good news. Though the biblical account ends here, the journey of the Church over two thousand years has continued the process of following Jesus in his mission to the world. The book of Revelation draws history to a close with the coming of the New Jerusalem as well as a new heaven and earth in the eschaton.

Thus, the movement initiated by God in creation travels toward a final fulfillment in the second coming of Jesus Christ. The idea of pilgrimage and journey reveals itself everywhere in the biblical text, both in the recap just given and in hundreds of smaller

examples (e.g., the life of Ruth, the story of Daniel, the disciples on the road to Emmaus). Obviously, the entire biblical discussion of journey cannot be fully explored. I have chosen to focus on two primary areas and three secondary areas that reveal the grounding in Scripture of the theme of pilgrimage, especially as it demonstrates the motif of movement toward fulfillment found throughout Scripture. The two primary areas are the call of Abraham and the Psalms of Ascents. The three secondary areas are the Incarnation as related in John 1:14, the Lukan journey of Jesus towards Jerusalem, and the pilgrimage status of Christians as described in Hebrews 11. I anticipate that through these texts the concept of pilgrimage as a journeying response to the call of God in a person's life will be clearly seen as a practice of spiritual formation thoroughly grounded in the Christian Scriptures.

The call of Abraham, found in Genesis 12:1-9, remains the quintessential example of God calling a person to enter into the act of pilgrimage. God's commands are forthright and clear: "leave" and "go" (12:1). Everything about those words involves movement and change. God told Abraham to abandon everything labeled with the pronoun "your" (e.g., country, people, father's household) and take on that which is labeled with "I" (e.g., the land I [God] will show you). The Hebrew word *halak* (leave, go) can also be translated "walk." It is used of Abraham and Lot's actions of response in 12:4. They obeyed in the walking. On the walk, on the pilgrimage, God appeared for the first time to Abraham. This tangible encounter with the Lord constitutes the first theophany to occur to any of the patriarchs. Interestingly, it happened not just as Abraham reached the Promised Land, but only after he has crossed its border and

traveled through it to the city of Shechem. God showed himself at this juncture and confirmed to Abraham that the land would be his.

John H. Sailhamer makes several helpful observations about this passage. He notes that Abraham's call occurred immediately after the dispersion of the nations at the Tower of Babel; thus, God purposes Abraham's call as a gift of salvation in the midst of judgment. In a similar manner to the way in which God's blessing was once marked by the tree of good and evil, and then by Noah's ark of salvation, it became marked by the new beginning that God made in the family of the obedient, faithful Abraham (111-12). Interestingly, that new beginning started a pilgrimage.

Sailhamer notes that Abraham's entry into the land came in three stages: Shechem, the area between Bethel and Ai, and the Negev. These progressive steps have parallels in the accounts of Jacob and the conquest of the land under Joshua. At Shechem, Abraham consummated the symbolic conquest of the land and its sanctification to the Lord. He saw God face-to-face and built an altar as a response. At the area between Bethel and Ai, he also built an altar and called upon the name of the Lord. Finally, in the Negev, Abraham purchased the field of Machpelah (chapt. 23) at Hebron and officially set down some roots (112). Sailhamer sees the building of altars and the purchasing of land as implications that the conquest of the land had been symbolically accomplished. Abraham displayed faith in the trustworthiness of God to provide for his descendents (113).

John Skinner notes that the command of God to Abraham to embark upon pilgrimage constitutes a trial of faith (243). Remarkably, this trial of faith will last a lifetime. Abraham will henceforth be intimately involved in pilgrimage. Skinner goes on

to point out the intentional pathos that is felt in the lingering description of what Abraham must leave behind—his country, his kindred, and even his father's house. Also, God's intentional vagueness about the goal (a land that I will show you) stresses all the more the heroic obedience of Abraham (as later noted in Heb. 11:8; 243). In contrast to his father (see Gen. 11:31), Abraham actually reaches the goal. The building of the altars signifies this sense of accomplishment (245).

The *New Interpreter's Bible* makes note that because of the journey his family has already begun in Ur, Abraham's call in 12:1 is not such a shocking event as some have suggested. Possibly Terah's family is part of the exiles from the disaster of the Tower of Babel. The family certainly experiences hard times. Genesis 11 relates the details of the uncompleted journey to Canaan, the death of Terah, the death of Haran, the orphaned state of Lot, and the barrenness of Sarah (Keck 1: 422). The increasing levels of intimacy in having to leave country, clan, and even father's family only builds the intensity of what is being asked of Abraham and his family (423).

Leander E. Keck calls Genesis 12:1-3 the fulcrum text, the key to the rest of Genesis. Abraham could not see his future and its promised blessings, but his response to God's call to pilgrimage shaped that future profoundly. A nation was made because of his obedience. Through that nation came God's blessing to the entire world. The open-endedness of God's command implies necessarily an absence of calculation on Abraham's part. His response was silent but active. He gathered his immediate family and possessions and walked (1: 422-23). Thus, the pilgrimage of Abraham and Sarah became a metaphor for the Christian life. It is "a journey that reaches out toward a promised future, but comes up short of final fulfillment within one's own lifetime" (426).

Gordon J. Wenham argues that Genesis 12:1-9 falls within a clear unit of Scripture that starts at Genesis 11:27 and runs through Genesis 12:1-9. Genesis 11:27-32 tells the family background of Abraham, and Genesis 12:1-9 lists the divine promises given to Abraham. The family background section is an expanded travel itinerary that adds indispensable information about the rest of the Abraham story (267). Details include where Abraham came from, why he is traveling with Lot, why he sends his servant back to Haran to find a wife for Isaac, and, perhaps most importantly to the promise of a family, the barrenness of Sarah, which explains why Abraham has no children when he enters the land.

Wenham sees Genesis 11:27-12:9 as an important link between primeval history and the patriarchal stories (268). Once the Abraham story begins, the text leaves behind the focus on the world as a whole. The subject focuses on the pilgrimage of one man and his family. What happened to them influenced the outcome of the entire biblical text. As viewed from this side of Christ's cross, Abraham's obedience affects world history as well.

Wenham splits Genesis 12:1-9 into the divine word (vv. 1-3) and the human response (vv. 4-9). The divine word comes in three stages: a command (v. 1), a promise (v. 2), and another promise (v. 3). The human response section also comes in three stages: journey (vv. 4-5), journey (vv. 6-7), and another journey (vv. 8-9). The divine word section and the human response section both begin with the Hebrew word *halak* ("go"). As well, "go" is almost the last word of verse 9 (269). Fascinatingly, the divine command to the pivotal person whose obedience will eventually end with the blessing of the whole world through the Incarnation and the salvation of humankind involves

embarking on a pilgrimage. When God decides to focus on the core act of faithful obedience to divine guidance, God chooses to ask a person to walk. Abraham was called to walk away from the known world and enter an unknown world in which his only lifeline was God. As the writer of Genesis shaped the text, the quintessential human response to the call of God was journey, journey, journey. As well, the word that encompasses the section on divine promises is "go."

Wenham notes that Terah was probably not dead at the time Abraham left. The order of events in the text is not necessarily chronological; thus, the call to leave one's father's house is a call of very costly obedience (274). Wenham observes that, according to calculations, Abraham had seventy-five years with his father, twenty-five years without a father or a son, and seventy-five years with his son (278). A twenty-five year time span without a father or a son would be a very difficult pilgrimage for an ancient Near Eastern male. Abraham's faith in the trustworthiness of God is only accentuated as one recognizes how long he operated in a significantly less than optimal situation according to the prevailing culture.

Wenham notes that Shechem is in a valley, Bethel is in the hill country, and the Negev, which literally means "the dry land," is desert. Abraham has seen the Promised Land. He has walked through, lived in, and worshiped in the Promised Land. He has visited the high points and the valleys. He has explored the lushness of the Jordan and the aridness of the wilderness. His obedience faithfully to follow God through a wandering existence stands metaphorically as both an example and an incentive for all his descendants to follow (278-81). Wenham speaks strongly to the frantic lifestyle of the hurried culture of contemporary America when he states, "Symbolically taking

possession of it, *lingering* [emphasis mine] at the holy places, *he has time* [emphasis mine] to build altars and pitch his tent, and to call on the name of the Lord" (282). The life and pilgrimage of Abraham is an example for his spiritual descendents through Christ. Living a life that prioritizes time spent with God on the journey seems, in the tradition of Abraham, both admirable and wise.

Psalms 120-134 are known in the Psalter as the Psalms of Ascents. Eugene H. Peterson calls them the "dog-eared songbook" (18) of Hebrew pilgrims as they made their way towards Jerusalem. He notes that these psalms were probably sung instead of spoken, and they were probably done in the order in which they appear in the present canon (18).

As prescribed in Exodus 23:14-17 and also in 34:22-24, the Israelite people were required to stop all activity three separate times during the year and attend a celebratory feast before the Lord. Prior to the conquest of Canaan, these events would have occurred in the camp at the site of the Tabernacle where God's presence resided in the Holy of Holies. After the conquest, these huge, national festivals would occur in Jerusalem where the Tabernacle, and eventually the Temple, resided. Because most Jews did not live in Jerusalem, a thrice-yearly journey, a pilgrimage, was necessary. In a way that tangibly imitated the lifestyle of their ancestor Abraham, the Jewish people left behind their land, their possessions, and occasionally family members (those who were too infirm to travel or who were temporarily, ritually unclean, due, for example, to recent childbirth) in order to follow the command of God to journey to a holy place. Interestingly, Exodus 34:24, a text written long before the Promised Land was entered and secured, uses the word *alah* (literally, "to go up," "ascend," "climb") in reference to this command of pilgrimage. The

Tabernacle may not have been necessarily physically higher than the rest of the camp, but Jerusalem was on top of a hill (Peterson [18] notes that it was the highest city in Palestine). Thus, once established in Canaan, the call to ascend eventually took on a physical meaning along with the obvious metaphorical meaning it originally held as a life turned upward to God.

Peterson comments that the three festivals for which this pilgrimage to Jerusalem was required were the following: the Feast of Passover, celebrated in the spring to commemorate God's saving actions during the Exodus event; the Feast of Pentecost, celebrated in the early summer to focus on renewing the Israelites' commitments as the covenant people of God; and, the Feast of Tabernacles, celebrated in the autumn as a response of thanksgiving for the blessings of God's harvest. As the people traveled together to these gatherings, they sang these "songs for the road" to help express God's amazing grace and quiet the anxious fears of travelers (19).

While discussing pilgrimage and the use of the Psalms of Ascents, Peterson distinguishes between the "tourist mindset" (16) and the "pilgrim mindset" (17). The tourist mind-set is one in which the traveler wants immediate gratification with little or no sacrifice. Religion is seen as a visit to an attractive site (a pretty church, for example) to be made when the tourist has adequate leisure (16). In contrast, the pilgrim mind-set is one of devotion and sacrifice. Pilgrims are people who spend their lives going someplace, going to God, and the path for getting there is Jesus Christ (17). Pilgrims are on a holy enterprise. They respond to the call of God, and they will stop the normal activities of their lives, drop everything, and obediently follow in God's way. Peterson believes that the Psalms of Ascents are powerful tools that provide a way for Christians to remember

who they are (pilgrims, not tourists) and where they are going (the way of God, which leads to life, not the way of the world, which leads to death; 20). He reminds his readers that the disciple Thomas' question, "We don't know where you are going, so how can we know the road?" is answered by Jesus: "I am the road, the truth and the life" (John 14:5-6; Peterson 17-18). The way for Christians to move towards fulfillment will always be through the Son who promises that, through him, those who follow will have life, and have it to the full (John 10:10).

Keck notes that the Hebrew word for "ascents" (*alah*) is also translated "steps" or "stairs." It is used specifically to refer to the steps of the Temple in Ezekiel 40:6. Also noted is a fascinating list of reasons why the Psalms of Ascents were most probably used by pilgrims on their way to the three yearly feasts in Jerusalem. Firstly, these psalms are all relatively short, with the exception of Psalm 132; they could be easily memorized by common people who would pick up the oral tradition on the journeys each year. Secondly, these psalms make frequent references to Jerusalem and Zion. Because the psalms were written after the exodus event when the Hebrews held Canaan and the feasts would be in Jerusalem, the place to which the pilgrims were headed was frequently named. Thirdly, certain elements within the structure of these psalms strongly imply group participation, for example, the alternation between singular and group references within the texts, where the leader would sing out a phrase after which everyone else would sing as a group. As well, overt liturgical elements are spread throughout including the following: invitations to response (Ps. 124:1; 129:1), professions of faith (Ps. 121:2; 124:8), and benedictions (Ps. 125:5; 134:3; Keck 4: 1176).

In a fourth example, Keck continues with the fact that these psalms deal with the issues of daily life about which common pilgrims (who had just left behind their homes, routines, and, in some cases, family members) would be thinking. References to daily life include the following: one's place of residence (Ps. 120:5-6), routine activities (Ps. 127:2), the importance of spouse and children (Ps. 128:3-4), and the importance of ties to larger family units and friends (Ps. 133:1). Fifthly, juxtaposed against these daily concerns are issues of national concern (Ps. 123-26, 130-32, 134.) These issues would be a natural topic of conversation and interest among diverse people who are brought together on the road and in the inns. The Hebrews' society, somewhat centralized around both the monarchy and worship at the Temple, was such that peoples' loyalties would transcend that of simply local and familial ties (4: 1176).

In the sixth and final example, Keck notes that the shape of the Psalms of Ascents' collection as a whole contains an overt pilgrimage orientation. Psalm 120:5 locates the speaker (singer) outside of Jerusalem and, indeed, outside of the land of Israel in general. As the collection begins, the pilgrims obviously are beginning their treks from diverse and sometimes distant places. In Psalm 121, verse one looks ahead to the mountains in the distance. Approaching Jerusalem from any direction would involve an obvious view of the mountains. Verses three and four express concern for stumbling and the general need for the safety of God's protection. Every pilgrim would have these types of apprehensions. Verses five and six speak of the need for protection from the heat of the sun and the dangers that lurk in the darkness. Verse eight mentions the journeying concepts of both arrival and departure. Psalm 122 gives the strong image of a group of pilgrims having arrived at the gates of Jerusalem, looking up into the heart of the city,

and praying for the peace of their most holy place. Finally, Psalm 134 serves as a beautiful benediction upon those who remain to serve continually in the house of the Lord (4: 1176). All of these nuances leave a strong impression that the Psalms of Ascents were most probably used by ancient, Hebrew pilgrims.

Leslie C. Allen notes that the meanings of the Psalms of Ascents were broadened as they became especially significant for the Jews of the Diaspora. These texts came to express the Jews' renewed conviction that God was on their side and would protect them from foreign neighbors in an alien land. If they were allowed to travel as pilgrims from their distant settings, their thrice-yearly trips (and the psalms they sang along the way) would bring renewal and courage for them to live as God's people in a foreign land (150). Allen also notes that the meaning of these psalms broadened even more as they became important to Christians in the early Church who were dispersed throughout the ancient world. Living as aliens in an unfamiliar context, they could draw hope and strength from the words of previous pilgrims who had followed God through hardships into his perfect, fulfilling will (150).

The prologue to John's gospel has always been recognized as one of the most significant Scriptures concerning the doctrine of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. Though this text is incredibly rich with meaning and worth, simply a few observations will be made regarding its implications for the concept of pilgrimage as found in John 1:14.

Keck notes the Greek word *ginomai* ("to come into being," "to happen," "to become") is used in this passage for the Word (*Logos*) for the very first time in this verse. The movement of the Word, which is first alluded to in verse nine (concerning the Light), is now made clear in verse fourteen. A decisive movement from the eternal realm to the

temporal realm is specified. By not using "Word" after verse one until verse fourteen, John sets up a stark comparison between the two verses. In verse one, the Word is God, whereas in verse fourteen the Word *becomes* flesh, that which is of this world (though not "worldly" in the moral sense). God does not lose his divinity, but he moves (grows, journeys) into an existence that also includes being human. As well, in verse one, the Word is with God, whereas in verse fourteen the Word has come to dwell among fellow human beings who share his human nature. The use of the word "us" implies that the Word has not just come to the world in general but to the believing community in particular (9: 522).

John 1:14 sheds light on the concept of pilgrimage by noting that the journey of the Word into this world is inclusive of both a process of spatial transfer as well as a process of relational enrichment. George R. Beasley-Murray notes that the Word became flesh so that all flesh might be able to see the glory of God. Through the Word's action, the way was made for all the scattered and broken children of the earth to be united into one (16).

Stephen Seamands argues eternal movement is at the core of God's loving, missional, sending nature. God exists in the community of the Trinity, three persons constantly reaching out in love (160-64). Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder echo Seamands' thoughts while noting the focus of God's love: "God is a community of Father, Son, and Spirit, constantly involved in the world" (287). God always moves in love *towards the world*. Jurgen Moltmann writes that the mission of the Trinitarian community (Father, Son, and Spirit) creates the community of the church as God reaches out in loving mission to bring salvation to the world (64). Jesus took the path (or journey)

to connect with people in order that people might be able to take the path back to reconnect with God. In other words, God, in the community of the Trinity, initiates the journey of love that flows in one direction towards humanity in order for humanity, in the community of the church, to have the opportunity to travel the same path of love back towards God.

Assuming the pilgrimage of the Word to earth is the final consummation and perfection of the concept of a journey towards fulfillment, and if the purpose of that pilgrimage was essentially to reestablish fully the connection between God and humanity by allowing for the restoration and healing of fallen humankind, then perhaps the possibility exists to argue that the essential nature of pilgrimage itself is somehow tied up in the process of not only spatial movement but also the enrichment of one's relationship with God such that humans become more godly. This "reverse-incarnational" idea is not meant in any way to argue for humans becoming little gods. The Bible clearly states that the holy "otherness" of God separates God from all created things. Instead, this concept of humans becoming more godly through pilgrimage suggests perhaps the nature of pilgrimage itself contains an ontological element that, when initiated and supported by the God of eternal motion, helps to draw the pilgrim into a movement towards the fulfillment of being truly godly in nature. Jesus preaches a similar concept in Matthew 5:48 when he proclaims that the human ideal in the kingdom of God is to be perfect, as the Father in heaven is perfect.

Luke's account of Jesus' journey from Galilee to Jerusalem is another example of the pilgrim way followed by Christ in the New Testament. I. Howard Marshall notes that this section of Luke's gospel, which Marshall determines to be Luke 9:51-19:10, is

primarily an occasion to showcase Jesus' teaching. Very little action occurs and very few mighty works are displayed in this section. The journey theme, however, is extremely strong. Luke reminds his readers at least ten times within the passage that Jesus is traveling from Galilee to Jerusalem. Although Luke wants to portray movement, he seems not to be interested in geographical progress. For example, Luke 10:38-42 takes place in the home of Mary and Martha, which, as indicated in other Scriptures, is located just outside Jerusalem in the town of Bethany. Seven chapters later, however, Luke places Jesus still on the border between Galilee and Samaria (Luke 17:11). Marshall's main point is to note that Luke is using the journey motif to stress the end goal of Jesus' pilgrimage. Luke values the fulfillment of Jesus' movement over the specific details. The important reality is that Jesus is headed to Jerusalem where he will do his mightiest and most significant work: to die and rise again (400-01).

Joel B. Green notes that Luke's story of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, which Green believes is covered in Luke 9:51-19:48, is shaped in order to mimic the "Deuteronomic portrayal of the Exodus journey as a series of speeches delivered by Moses to the people of God" (398). In a similar way, Jesus is teaching about the kingdom as he prepares to finish his work on earth and return to the Father. Green observes that throughout its text, the gospel of Luke emphasizes "the way." John the Baptist prepares the way of the Lord. Jesus will guide believers' feet in the way of peace. The Emmaus disciples are instructed by Jesus as they travel on the way from Jerusalem. As well, in the book of Acts, also written by Luke, the followers of Jesus are known as "the way." In the same vein as Marshall, Green observes that Luke uses this journeying motif portrayed in the pilgrimage of Jesus to the holy city (something he would have done many times as a

faithful Jew) in order to emphasize the destination and its importance as opposed to the process itself. In a summing up of Luke's emphasis on process and movement, Green notes that Luke uses the concept of journeying to underscore the fulfillment of God's redemptive purposes in this world (398-99). In other words, Luke is using the theme of pilgrimage to accentuate the movement towards fulfillment motif, which he sees clearly as the action of God through Christ.

Green also notes that Luke uses the idea of journeying to promote the concept of the formation of a people who will hear and obey the word of God (399). Once again, pilgrimage is seen as a way to foster people's obedience to God. Luke recognizes the power of this metaphor. As people move toward the fulfillment God has planned for them, they are formed into those who can recognize the voice of God and who are empowered to obey God. Thus, pilgrimage stands as a biblical process that serves to form people spiritually.

The final text explored is Hebrews 11:13-16. F. F. Bruce observes that the people who died in faith without seeing the fulfillment of God's promises (Heb. 11:13) refers back to the patriarchs listed in earlier verses of chapter eleven. Bruce sees Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as the preeminent pilgrims because of their lives of wandering and their faith that the land would be theirs. Bruce contends that the author of Hebrews is clear that the patriarchs in no way considered the land of Palestine to be their true home (298). This understanding of the patriarchs is evident because they described themselves as strangers and sojourners in the land (e.g., Gen. 23:4 where Abraham describes himself in this manner to the sons of Heth). As well, although they had the opportunity, they intentionally did not return to live in the country from which they came. Their hearts

were fixed on a country not of this earth. Somehow they trusted that the God whom they were following on a lifelong pilgrimage into strange and foreign contexts would lead them to a better place.

Bruce notes that the writer of Hebrews is using the example of the patriarchs in order to guide the readers towards the true values of God. Christians will live on this earth, but they will never fully belong here (299). Paul reminds the Philippians that their citizenship is in heaven, not on earth (Phil. 3:20). As sojourners in this world, Christians must hold lightly the things to which they are tempted to feel grounded. Nothing of the temporal world will fully establish believers because they are inherently spiritual people whose fulfillment will only be found in God. Bruce observes that God expresses his values by honoring in a very special manner those who put their faith in God. God honors faithful followers by choosing to refer to himself by the names of those followers (299). This concept is strange and wonderful. The God of the universe gives himself a new name (the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob) as defined by the names of those who follow him in pilgrimage towards the fulfillment he offers. God highly values the obedience of following him, and all those who follow him are defined as pilgrims on the journey of faith through a strange and alien land.

Finally, William L. Lane notes that Hebrews 11:13-16 is exploring the dialectic between faith and hope through the following three motifs: pilgrimage, the sight but not attainment of a goal, and the disavowal of a worldly goal. He contends that the human mind is capable of hope because of its consciousness of a real, non-present, invisible, heavenly world. Those who retain this hope evidence a dynamic faith by persevering in following God despite difficult life circumstances. They reject their own way and follow

God in his path because they fundamentally believe in God's faithfulness to them (395). In other words, they embrace the call to be pilgrims, and they willingly embark upon the journey of faith because they have a powerful hope that the God who called them to movement will lead them to the fulfillment they deeply desire.

All these texts (and many more) establish the reality that the motif of pilgrimage is thoroughly grounded in the heart of Scripture. Both God and humans are intimately involved in a process of movement towards a greater fulfillment that God will be faithful to complete. The pilgrim way is one that inherently shapes and forms those who travel it. Pilgrimage is a biblical process forming people into maturing and growing disciples. Those who practice this faithful process of obedient journeying will find it leads to abundant life.

Journey as a Metaphor for Life

Human beings live as perpetual travelers. Whether or not they physically move from place to place, they constantly progress and grow in a desire for love, a hunger for truth, and a longing for connection to the infinite. Naturally, therefore, the concept of journey serves as a metaphor for human existence. "The pilgrimage which started from Abraham and is extended throughout the centuries is a sign of a vaster and universal movement of humankind" (Pontifical Council 23).

Os Guinness calls journey the deepest and most universal image for human life. Guinness quotes a diverse group of sources (e.g., Malcolm Muggeridge, Jessica Lange, and Winston Churchill) who all use the concept of journey to describe their lives (DuRant 5). Donald Joy employs the concept of pilgrimage to explain the human race's ever-unfolding understanding of life and human development. In a discussion of the life as

pilgrimage metaphor, Joy notes that five characteristics consistently emerge. Life pilgrimage is dynamic, relational, aspirational, epochal, and cumulative (16). Jeffery E. Greenway, former president of Asbury Theological Seminary, reminds his readers that John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, referred to the Christian life as the *via salutis* (the way of salvation). Greenway continues, "The road we travel in life is a journey of faith, and each step along the way can be used to fulfill God's purpose in and for us" ("Looking for God" 3).

Dennis F. Kinlaw notes that the ancient Hebrews viewed life as a journey. To live means one is walking towards a goal. The Hebrews viewed the orientation of the world as moving from east to west (following the path of the sun). The Hebrew word for *west* is the same as *back*. *North* equals *left*. *South* equals *right*. *East* equals *front*. In a unique twist on the motif of life as journey, the ancient Hebrews metaphorically faced east, the direction of the past, and backed their way westward into the future. In light of this orientation, the journey of life was necessarily one of faith as well. The Hebrews could only travel life's journey, without stumbling, by taking God's hand and consciously remembering God's faithfulness to them in the past.

Voices from hundreds of different backgrounds and worldviews speak of life in the metaphor of journey. Diverse religions and cultures use the language of travel to describe the human existence. Naturally, therefore, the experience of pilgrimage holds a powerful place in spirituality across the world.

History of Pilgrimage

The diversity of pilgrimage mirrors that of cultures. A multiplicity of "purposes and causes, images and symbols, routes and terrains, miracles and cures, messages and

promises" characterize pilgrimage from across the globe (Carrasco 13). Pilgrimage has classical traditions found in the major religions of the world, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Shinto, and Buddhist, as well as thousands of localized, regional events that cross religious boundaries (13).

Within Christianity, the earliest followers of Christ came from Jewish origins and were well acquainted with the thrice yearly pilgrimages to Jerusalem demanded in the Torah. Jerusalem stood as the place of sacred geography where God met the chosen Hebrew people at the Temple. Jesus took part in these trips throughout his lifetime.

With this background, Christian pilgrimage to holy places began at a very early date. The caves of Christ's burial and nativity, the martyr's tombs, and other holy sites were quickly established as places of worship and reverence. The Roman road system provided safe routes for those who wished to travel. Emperor Constantine encouraged Christian pilgrimage by declaring it legal, building churches at holy sites, and allowing Empress Helena to travel to Jerusalem to worship (Wilkinson 43).

Soon stories of pilgrimage began to arise within Western Christendom. Sometime around AD 410, Egeria produced her *Diary of a Pilgrimage*, which recounted a trip to Constantinople, Jerusalem, Sinai, Egypt, and other places of interest in the Middle East. Most scholars believe that Egeria was a consecrated virgin from Galicia who was traveling with a group of fellow religious pilgrims (Gingras 11-17).

By the sixth century, pilgrimage in the Western church was becoming an act of piety in order to grow in holiness. Pilgrimage became a standard feature in the life of most persons who would later be seen as saints (Coleman and Elsner 91). By the eleventh century, pilgrimage had grown into the idea of a crusade against the Muslim occupation

of Palestine. To go on crusade was to enter a pilgrimage, and the remission of sins was one benefit the church promised to those who went and fought (96). In extreme cases of the crusade paradigm, pilgrimage became a license to sin. Ironically, pilgrimage, which had begun as an act of piety, was now twisted to become an alternative to living a life of Christian morality (Sumption 419).

Thankfully, not all Western Christians used pilgrimage negatively. Medieval Celtic Christians used pilgrimage as a means of missionary outreach. Irish monks and nuns became pilgrim evangelists, spreading Christianity to England, Scotland, Wales, and the European continent (Pemberton 24-26). In addition, the mendicant movement in Europe launched thousands of clergy and lay missionaries into lives of permanent pilgrimage as they wandered and preached for the sake of Christ. Up until the Reformation, the Franciscans and Dominicans emerged as those on the forefront of mission, a mission performed primarily in a state of active pilgrimage (Bevans and Schroeder 159).

The Reformation brought about a strong negative reaction to the abuses of pilgrimage in Western Christianity. Martin Luther and Erasmus both argued that the indulgences, the relics, and the cult of the saints, all associated with pilgrimage at that time, ran counter to the true nature of following Jesus Christ (Davies 96).

While Roman Catholic pilgrimage has continued unabated to the present time, Protestant pilgrimage has only begun to reemerge strongly in the twentieth century. To an extent, Anglicanism drove this reemergence of Protestant pilgrimage with the rediscovery of the local cathedral, and especially Canterbury, as a place of pilgrimage. Trips to the Holy Land also increased greatly during this time due to the convenience of

intercontinental travel and the British occupation of Palestine through World War II (Davies 159-61). Protestant visits to Celtic pilgrimage sites have also increased greatly over the last two decades. People are rediscovering the ancient pilgrimage ways and destinations that continue to inspire those who embark upon this spiritual discipline (Pemberton 52-60). Even Evangelicals are beginning to become aware of the benefits of pilgrimage. In a recent Web essay from Easum Bandy Associates, a prominent Evangelical consulting group, Bill Tenny-Brittian argues for the need for Christians to embrace pilgrimage once again as a powerful, transformative spiritual formation tool. He encourages pilgrims to immerse themselves in the physical, sometimes painful, process of journeying to a holy place and sojourning there long enough to listen, experience, and simply connect with God.

Rite of Passage and Liminality

The ritual process of rite of passage seems to explain some of the experiences encountered in a pilgrimage event. Craig Scandrett-Leatherman notes that rite of passage events involve three distinct stages: separation, marginality, and reincorporation. In the separation stage, rituals are performed to disconnect the participant from the social community. During the marginality stage, the participant gains new understanding about identity and status. In the reincorporation stage, rituals are again performed to return the participant to the social setting with a new status and a new understanding of reality (313).

Victor Turner calls the middle (marginal) phase the liminal period. According to Turner, “liminality” refers to the necessarily ambiguous state in which the participants “are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and

arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial" (95). This process can be humbling, especially as the participants experience a certain loss of status. Turner continues by noting that the participants begin to form an intense comradeship and egalitarianism that crosses previous distinctions of rank and status. Turner calls this group-building process of homogenization "communitas" (96). A bonding occurs that could not transpire outside the experience of liminality.

Scandrett-Leatherman notes this group bonding often emerges through a process of suffering or sacrifice labeled anti-structure (Turner's original term). Structure would be the societal norms of property, status, distinctions of wealth, speech, and a consistent state. Anti-structure would be the opposite of these previously mentioned characteristics: absence of property, absence of status, no distinctions of wealth, silence, and transition (314).

Pilgrimage seems to incorporate many of these elements of rite of passage. The pilgrim goes through rituals of leaving society. Bills are paid, travel arrangements are made, job and family responsibilities are covered, and relationships are temporarily severed (often through a party or official farewell ceremony). The pilgrim then enters the liminal stage by becoming a wanderer, a person officially not functioning within the normal processes of society. The formative suffering that bonds the pilgrim closely with pilgrimage companions comes through the physical exertion of the daily movement as well as the new status as a "nonproductive" person who has no job responsibilities or even a physical plot of land to call one's own. Attempts at explaining to curious onlookers why one would "waste one's time" traveling (especially walking when faster transportation is available) often fail. This feeling of alienation from the rest of society

grows significantly the longer the pilgrimage experience. Finally, the pilgrim reaches the end of the journey and returns to society. In the process, however, the pilgrim has changed and now has a new outlook on both the old society and on the understanding of reality.

Robert J. Brancatelli, a Roman Catholic religious educator, uses pilgrimage as a catechetical tool to guide youth through a spiritual rite of passage leading to a mature ownership of their faith. In recognition of the importance of the liminal phase, Brancatelli notes that the overcoming of the challenge of the "test" (a marginal state of suffering) makes the pilgrimage effective (1). The youth prepare extensively for a pilgrimage experience and then participate in a long hike to a destination of spiritual significance. Upon arrival, the youth spend the night outside and, in the tradition of many biblical characters (Levi-Matthew, Simon-Peter, Saul-Paul), gain a new name by which to be called within their pilgrim group (34-35).

In his Doctor of Ministry dissertation, Stephen Fletcher Venable used a backpacking trip based on a rite of passage model to study whether teenagers would grow spiritually. Instruments used to evaluate the students' spiritual growth were the Spiritual Well-Being Scale and personal journals. According to Venable's data, spiritual growth occurred in varying degrees among the participants (59). Students left the comfort of their homes and entered the liminal experience of backpacking in the Rocky Mountains. At the end of the trip, students participated in a rite of passage ceremony intended to help them return to their society with a new sense of spiritual maturity and adulthood. Venable's data indicates the students grew spiritually, but Venable questioned the power of the rite of passage because it was not recognized as sacred and might soon dissipate after the

students reentered society (72). Venable's study, in a similar way to Brancatelli's catechetical experience, was a pilgrimage for Western adolescents attempting to become "spiritual adults."

Frantic Lifestyle and Stress

In his book, Randy Frazee notes that the chaotic lifestyle of the typical American family drives people so strongly that they have "squeezed living out of life" (13). Conventional wisdom teaches that gaining more financial resources leads to a stress-free, relaxing life, but reality makes clear that more resources means increased complexity and a greater potential for self-destruction (17).

North Americans feverishly work to control life's circumstances, to multitask, and to manage time efficiently while simultaneously attempting to limit stress and anxiety. Four-fifths of Americans express a desire to reduce life stress (Swenson 58). Stress destroys personal lives, family life, and work environments. Human desires promise lasting happiness if satisfied, but stress inevitably follows any attempt to fulfill wants and longings apart from those rooted in God (Shores 80).

Mark Buchanan describes driven persons as those who, at some point in the journey, forget the reason they originally embarked. The purpose of the experience is eroded under the weight of the striving. This desperate time management model is in direct contrast to what Buchanan describes as "the sum total of Christ's earthly vocation: he wandered, and he blessed" (43-44). Buchanan believes Christians are heirs of eternity. He concludes, "We're not short of days. We just need to number them aright" (45).

The North American lifestyle distorts a healthy understanding of priorities. Instead of grounding their identities in Christ, believers strive to be useful, to entertain

themselves, to accomplish multiple tasks in a limited time, and to gain more possessions. Tim Stafford laments the difficulty of teaching his teenaged children to make do with less when he rarely deprives himself of various indulgences. In fact, the idea of “less” has virtually vanished in the immediate gratification lifestyle of North America (61).

Christians must provide an alternative approach to life if the dominant culture is to recognize that being a Christian is more than the normal frantic existence with a little religion sprinkled on top. Rowan Williams writes that Bernard of Clairvaux believed monasticism to be a challenge to the church and the world, both of which viewed the monks as men who chose a perhaps virtuous but certainly absurd lifestyle (119). In a similar vein, pilgrimage might be viewed as an absurd, non-useful waste of time. Critics may view walking to a destination when faster transportation is available as poor time management, yet pilgrimage, by its intrinsic nature, stands as a strong symbol of protest to the utilitarianism and frantic pace of North American culture.

Andrew Walls discusses the challenge to the status quo which the gospel brings to any culture. Walls labels this challenge the “pilgrim principle” (98). Christians know inherently this world is not their home. By being faithful to Jesus, followers of Christ will always be out of step with society because no culture exists that can absorb the word of Christ painlessly into its system (99). Pilgrimage expresses a walking testimony that Christians are called to be radically different than their culture. Pilgrimage tangibly reminds believers that the frenetic pace and constant acquisition of goods that define the North American lifestyle stand in direct opposition to the pilgrim identity that defines itself through Christ and knows this world is not home.

In a detailed discussion of the anthropological concept of contextualization, Darrell L. Whiteman notes the need for people to understand the gospel within their own cultural context. Each culture reflects different nuances of Christianity, but no culture fully understands Christianity because Christianity is not culture bound. Every society needs to interact and appreciate what other societies across time and distance have valued in the Christian experience (4). In stressing the importance of listening to other voices of the Christian faith, John V. Taylor notes, "The spiritual sickness of the West … may be healed through a recovery of the wisdom which Africa has not yet thrown away" (108). Both Whiteman and Taylor describe the importance of appreciating how others follow Jesus. Millions of Christians from multiple cultures, contexts, and centuries have valued pilgrimage as a powerful spiritual formation tool. The kinesthetic and physically progressive natures of pilgrimage allow people to remove themselves from their normal contexts and journey to meet God. Walking the pilgrim path fosters talking to Jesus, day dreaming, relaxing mentally, and listening better to the voice of God. The frantic, stressful pace of Protestant North American culture needs to rediscover the power of pilgrimage.

Natural Settings

In an e-mail message to the seminary community, Greenway notes that despite the great education he received from multiple sources, nothing helped him understand Scripture better than the "formational, informational, and transformational" aspects of going on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land ("Walking Where Jesus Walked" 1). Similarly, Paul Lucien Phillips studied the impact of a pilgrimage to the Holy Land on the spiritual life of United Methodists and found that all the participants expressed that the pilgrimage

experience was meaningful and important. Twelve of the fourteen subjects indicated the pilgrimage was a strong growth tool for their Christian lives. Even after two years, the spiritual impact of the trip was still powerful (76). Phillips' instrument for measuring impact was the personal interview (52).

Hiking the dusty trails, inhaling the exotic smells, and feeling the burning sun challenges the desire for comfort but also opens the pilgrim to greater growth. Nothing substitutes for leaving behind the usual duties and experiencing the process of active pilgrimage. For thousands of years, people have understood the power of the natural setting in transforming lives. James T. Neill, a researcher in outdoor education, reports that a therapeutic role for nature, wilderness, and adventure can be traced from early human tribal life to modern civilizations ("Historical and Developmental Aspects"). Plato championed outdoor experiences because the improvement of the physical body led to the more important improvement, in his opinion, of morals and the soul (Hattie et al. 43).

In his book exploring the power of wilderness spirituality, Belden C. Lane notes that in the ancient Hebrew exodus from Egypt, God leads the people through the wilderness instead of the easier, more direct coastal route to Canaan. In Exodus 13:17, many rabbis argue that the Hebrew word *ki* should be translated "because" instead of "although." God decided against the coastal route *because* it was less demanding. God intentionally chose the more difficult wilderness landscape as his crucible to grow and shape the Hebrews' faith (44-45).

Williams discusses Augustine's beliefs concerning nature and its beauty:

> All beauty, in some degree, pierces our blindness and deafness, leads us away from the dominating, organizing life of the intellect; in its alarming and overpowering character (and Augustine thinks here especially of

> spectacular “natural” beauties), it is a standing challenge to the human fantasy of a world of controlled intelligibility. (86-87)

I strongly resonate with this quote because it coincides with my Appalachian Trail experience in which the power of nature and beauty helped heal me of the sometimes unhealthy demands of a life dominated by organization and intellect. Living in a manner more open to intuition and to listening for the voice of God at a quiet, non-frantic pace does not mean the intellect is shunned, only balanced and more properly prioritized. Nature appropriately challenges the human fantasy of control.

George G. Hunter III, reports the early Celtic Christians loved to celebrate the gospel in the open air. The Celts lived in natural settings and their pagan cultural background made them predisposed to respect and revere nature. They believed the veil between the natural and the supernatural (earth and heaven) was much thinner, especially at holy places, than the Roman Christians believed. The early Celtic Christians saw that life is deeply enriched by living in covenant with both creation and Creator (86-88). In short, they recognized the power of nature to help draw people closer to God. In a later chapter, Hunter notes the Celtic Christian influence on the Alpha Course (a contemporary evangelistic tool) where weekend retreats are intentionally held in a natural setting because the organizers recognize that “people are more likely to experience the Holy Spirit in nature” (114).

John Hattie et al. performed a meta-analysis based on ninety-six outdoor adventure studies in order to examine the effects of adventure programs on a diverse array of outcomes such as self-concept, locus of control, and leadership. The studies indicate immediate growth from the outdoor programs as well as substantial additional gains over time with follow-up assessments (43). Neill reports that meta-analytic studies

of outdoor education indicate positive growth such as changes in self-concept and self-confidence as a result of educational experiences in the outdoors ("Reviewing and Benchmarking Adventure Therapy" 318). Both Neill (318) and Hattie et al. (43) found the most effective programs involved a longer time spent in the outdoors and participants who were adults.

In her dissertation, April Lee Roberts notes that adventure provides a transformative experience that fuels personal growth. As identified by participants in Roberts' study, elements that lead to transformative adventure include the following: risk, genuine challenge, natural setting, connection, and closure (131). These elements resonate with components found in right of passage experiences and pilgrimage narratives. Leaving home and security involves risk. Rejecting the status quo to embark upon a rigorous journey challenges the pilgrim. Nature provides cleansing and healing. Connection to other travelers fosters life-sustaining community. Long-term healthy growth demands liminal closure and reentry into normal cultural lifestyles.

In their discussion of the use of camping in religious education, Stephen F. Venable and Donald M. Joy promote the importance of physical progression, vital community, and simplified lifestyle. As journeyers, in this case, backpackers, move from place to place, the old is left behind and each new day brings new experiences. Pilgrims move in a group, forced by circumstances to work together to overcome challenges and differences. The journey encourages dependence upon God and other pilgrims. The simplified lifestyle, which nature forces upon journeyers, tests and refines life's priorities, thus teaching pilgrims to hold onto only the bare necessities (104). Historian Richard E. Sullivan writes about medieval monks helping bring about reform in their surrounding

communities by creating programs “that would produce a change of heart among the wicked through a process that involved a simplification of life-styles” (38). Leaving the comforts of home and temporarily living life on the road teaches pilgrims that less is more. Moving through the natural environment is made easier with fewer possessions.

Dean Edward Wilson notes in his doctoral dissertation that spiritual growth occurred in participants who served others on a short-term mission trip. Worshiping with those being served and team devotional time especially fostered growth (73-74). Wilson used pre- and post-questionnaires to gather his data (75). In another doctoral dissertation, Charles R. Shonkwiler examined the impact of a three-day backpacking excursion to increase spiritual health among clergy. He notes that very little time was needed on the trail to separate from normal activity and become fully engaged in the excursion (67). Shonkwiler also indicates that participants improved in self-care, health, and spiritual renewal after only three days of respite from the demands of pastoral ministry (69-70). Shonkwiler used pre- and post-interviews, journaling, and participant observation to gather his data (43).

Research Design

William Wiersma and Stephen G. Jurs describe qualitative research as holistic, flexible, open to the changing experience and perceptions of the participants as they interact with a potentially changing context, and non-mechanistic in its design. Qualitative research uses inductive inquiry, thus allowing the researcher to approach the project openly without attempting to prove any preconceived theories or hypotheses. Methods of data collection include, but are not limited to, open-ended questionnaires,

interviews, and participant observation (201-05). Research of this type seems appropriately qualified to study the impact of a pilgrimage experience.

Barbara and Robert Sommer note that qualitative research places less emphasis on categories and quantification and more emphasis on detailed personal description. Participant observation is an important tool in qualitative research, which allows the observer to understand better the holistic nature of the experience. “The participant-observer has a defined and active role in what is happening, as distinct from being a spectator, bystander, or customer” (55-56).

Data collection for qualitative research involves an organizing process called coding. Coding allows the researcher to reduce lengthy statements and observations into specific response categories (Sommer and Sommer 124). Triangulation is a means of cross-validating qualitative data. Triangulation judges the quality of the data by converging multiple data sources and data-collection procedures (Wiersma and Jurs 256). In triangulation researchers use two or more research methods to gather data as a check and balance on a single observer’s account (Denzin 308). Triangulation also allows the researcher to develop “converging lines of inquiry” (Yin 97), which produce a fuller understanding of the actual impact of the research project. Developing a “chain of evidence” (102) allows the reader to follow data from initial research questions to ultimate conclusions in either direction.

Conclusion

This chapter has established the biblical, theological, and historical context of the study on the impact of pilgrimage. This chapter has also reviewed pertinent literature to place the study in the context of already-existing research. Pilgrimage originates in

Scripture, provides a metaphor for life, produces spiritual growth throughout history and across cultures, incorporates anthropological elements of liminality and rite of passage, counteracts the frantic North American lifestyle, and rejuvenates pilgrims in powerful natural settings. Existing research demonstrates that short-term, liminal, outdoor-influenced experiences produce important growth in participants. God himself chose to participate in the powerful experience of pilgrimage. Physical journeying towards a meaningful spiritual destination is a God-given, tangible reminder that Christians are sojourners in this world and are ultimately identified as children of God who follow Jesus wherever he might lead. Pilgrimage shaped the patriarchs and still grows people in their spiritual lives today. In a frenetic, stress-filled culture where even Christians sometimes forget their purpose in life, pilgrimage stands as a tool to help Christians make time and space in their lives in order to reconnect with their core identity as children of God, temporarily sojourning in this world, while looking to their eternal home.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

A frantic, driven lifestyle seems to pervade the North American culture. Society esteems those who can accomplish multiple tasks in a very short time. Efficiency, productivity, and achievement are valued assets. Individuals tend to define themselves by what they do for work rather than to whom they are related. Human identity connects itself more to achievement than to character. Doing is more important than being.

This frantic lifestyle permeates the North American church. Although Christian identity is clearly grounded in relationship with God, American Christians live frantic lives based not on their status as children of God but on their assumption that identity originates from what they accomplish. Constant activity leaves little room for connection with God. An amnesia concerning Christian identity causes believers to forget easily that God calls them to walk the journey of faith and that their journey is a small part of God's greater journey in which exists a constant movement toward fulfillment.

The tangible experience of pilgrimage taught me to reflect on the idea that God is more interested in Christians walking with God than accomplishing tasks for God. Setting aside time to travel to a spiritually meaningful place reminds believers that Christ set aside the joys of heaven to travel the human journey in order to restore God's relationship with humanity. Perhaps pilgrimage serves as a spiritual formation tool by which Christians may periodically reconnect with their true identity as sojourners not settlers (Heb. 11:13). The purpose of this research project, therefore, was to study the impact of a three-day pilgrimage experience on the participants' understandings of their Christian identity in relation to life choices of creating time and space to encounter God.

Research Questions

The purpose statement of this study calls for an evaluation of the impact of a three-day pilgrimage experience on the participants' understandings of their Christian identity in relation to life choices of creating time and space to encounter God. The research questions generated from this study are reflective of the purpose statement.

Research Question #1

How did the participants describe their awareness of God and/or relationship with God before, during, and after the pilgrimage experience?

The answers to this research question provide a means of tracking the participants' evolving understanding of their Christian identity through the impact of the independent variable (the three-day pilgrimage experience) upon the participants. This question denotes two assumptions about the participants. The first assumption is that participants' understanding of their relationship with God is indicative of their understanding of Christian identity. If Christian identity is the recognition that Christian persons are fundamentally defined through their relationship with God, then how well they rate their relationship with God sheds light on how much their identity is wrapped up in being in relationship with God. The second assumption underlying research question #1 is that the factors influencing the participants' understanding of their relationship with God include life choices that either generate, or do not generate, opportunities for the participants to create time and space to encounter God.

The first seven questions in the registration questionnaire helped explore research question #1 (see Appendix C). Questions one and two asked each participant to consider a Christian they greatly admire, describe that person, and then discuss in what ways the

participant is like or unlike the person described. This process helped participants clarify in concrete terms characteristics of a person assumed to possess a strong relationship with God, which, in turn, encouraged participants to explore their own awareness of God and/or relationship with God as participants associated themselves either positively or negatively with the Christian whom they admired.

Questions three through five on the registration questionnaire helped participants examine their previous, current, and perceived future awareness of God and/or relationship with God. Questions six and seven, which pertained to roles by which participants identified themselves and how those roles influenced participants' choices concerning time usage, encouraged participants to explore how their identity influences their actions and whether or not their identity is linked to their relationship with God.

The first eight questions in the closing questionnaire helped explore research question #1 (see Appendix G). In questions one through three, participants rated their post-pilgrimage relationship with God while examining how the pilgrimage shaped that relationship as well as what specifically about the pilgrimage experience had the greatest impact on that relationship. The fourth and fifth questions challenged participants to consider how the pilgrimage would impact their use of time and what self-discovery the pilgrimage made clear. The sixth and seventh questions revisited the issue of roles and identity and the use of time pertaining to roles. The eighth question studied the liminal impact of the pilgrimage at which point participants could disengage from the obligations at home and begin to engage fully in their identity as pilgrims. This time of liminality is when participants were most available to grow in their understanding of what impact the pilgrimage was making on the participants' relationship with God.

The closing questionnaire was the starting point for the personal interviews, which I conducted with each participant four to six weeks subsequent to the pilgrimage (see Appendix H). Therefore, in a similar manner to that which is noted under the closing questionnaire, the first seven questions of the personal interviews helped explore research question #1.

Research Question #2

What was the self-identified level of stress in the participants before, during, and after the pilgrimage experience?

The manner in which participants understand their Christian identity shapes the life choices they choose to embrace. Conversely, the life choices participants choose to embrace shape the manner in which participants understand their Christian identity. The research study explores the premise that taking time out of a frantic lifestyle to participate in a pilgrimage experience, which included discussions on the theology of the pilgrim identity, might serve to remind the participants of their identity as children of God called to join the greater journey of faith in which God is the central pilgrim. Theoretically, the more participants understand that their identity is grounded in their relationship with God, the more likely they will not feel obligated to fill their lives with the stress of multiple activities in order to produce accomplishments upon which to build their identities. Therefore, research question #2 examines the self-identified sense of stress that participants had before, during, and after the pilgrimage experience. I asked this question in order to assess the impact the pilgrimage had on participants' sense of stress.

Questions eight, ten, and eleven on the registration questionnaire helped the participants explore the stress they had been experiencing prior to coming on the

pilgrimage and the areas in their lives from which stress originates (see Appendix C). Question nine on the registration questionnaire encouraged the participants to describe the self-care practices in which they typically participate in order to manage stress in their lives. Question twelve on the registration questionnaire assessed the participants' current level of stress coming into the pilgrimage experience.

Question nine on the closing questionnaire helped participants explore what perceived impact the pilgrimage experience will have on their self-care practices (see Appendix G). Because of what they have just learned experientially and theologically, perhaps participants will change their self-care practices in order to manage stress in their lives better. Questions ten and eleven on the closing questionnaire helped participants examine their current and perceived future stress levels as a result of having undergone the pilgrimage experience.

The closing questionnaire was the starting point for the personal interviews, which I conducted with each participant four to six weeks subsequent to the pilgrimage (see Appendix H). Therefore, in a similar manner to that which is noted under the closing questionnaire, questions nine through eleven of the personal interviews helped explore research question #2.

Throughout the pilgrimage event, I observed whether or not the participants verbalized any new understandings of their Christian identity based on their participation in the pilgrimage. I noted statements from participants concerning their anticipated future life choices of creating time and space to encounter God. I also recorded participants' statements concerning their current levels of stress. I made these observations as a

participant observer. Information gathered in this manner further helped explore research questions #1 and #2.

Project

The project consisted of eleven participants spending three days and three nights hiking a twenty-seven mile route from the southern end of Letchworth State Park located in Portageville, New York, to the Abbey of the Genesee located in Piffard, New York. Each participant was a self-identified Christian residing in western New York state. Most of the walking occurred on hiking paths and park roadways. Participants spent the first two evenings en route at cabins within Letchworth State Park. I provided to participants food, shelter, firewood, and access to their personal supplies in the evenings. Participants spent their final evening at the guest house at the Abbey of the Genesee. Eight volunteer drivers shuttled the seven cars belonging to the participants from the starting point to the ending point of the pilgrimage so that participants could return home on Sunday.

Participants arrived in the park on Thursday afternoon at 4:00 p.m. Participants gathered at the southern park entrance where they were introduced to each other and the pilgrimage itinerary. Participants then hiked four miles to the Cabin B area where they spent the night. On Friday, participants hiked eleven miles to the Cabin C area where they spent the night. On Saturday, participants hiked twelve miles to the guest house at the Abbey of the Genesee. On Sunday, participants hiked or rode the 1½ miles to and from the Abbey sanctuary for worship services (2:25 a.m. Vigils or 6:00 a.m. Lauds), shared a final gathering time, and contemplated the pilgrimage experience. Participants finished with lunch followed by completing a questionnaire with open-ended questions.

Participants prepared breakfasts, bag lunches (to be consumed en route), and suppers at the cabins and at the Abbey.

I asked participants to leave behind all radios, computers, and other links to society. I allowed participants to carry their cell phones with the stipulation that participants turn the phones off and promise not to use the phones unless facing an emergency. Immediately prior to each day's hike, participants assembled at an initial daily gathering to hear teaching on some aspect of pilgrimage, which I presented in oral form (see Appendix D). Participants then received walking instructions that included the following: a map, logistical information, directives concerning when to hike solo and when to seek partners if desired, and Scripture passages with follow-up questions (see Appendix E). Participants took rest breaks wherever they chose along the pilgrimage path. I encouraged participants to reflect on the Scripture passages throughout the day. At the conclusion of each day, after a shared meal, participants and I assembled for an ending daily gathering (see Appendix F). I accompanied singing on my guitar and then guided the discussion in which participants shared their thoughts and feelings concerning my talks on pilgrimage, the hike, the Scripture passages and their follow-up questions, and any other reactions to the pilgrimage experience.

Two volunteer assistants provided support services including the following: transporting participants' personal items to the overnight stops, providing water and snacks along the pilgrimage route, running errands, cleaning cabins, hiking with weakened participants, and doing other miscellaneous tasks. The two assistants also participated in initial daily gatherings (see Appendix D) and ending daily gatherings (see Appendix F) and, after having left the participants at bed time, helped me recall

individual participants' reflections that had been shared throughout the day. Letchworth State Park policy required that I rent cabins for a minimum of two consecutive nights. The two volunteer assistants and I slept in the other set of cabins from the participants (i.e., when they were in the B cabins, we stayed in the C cabins, and *vice versa*) for the two nights we were in the park. While at the Abbey, the assistants and I slept in a separate section of the guest house.

I acted as a participant observer, leading initial daily gatherings (see Appendix D) and ending daily gatherings (see Appendix F), providing support services throughout the day, and sharing meals with the participants. In the late evenings, I recorded information that participants had shared concerning the impact of the pilgrimage on their lives. On the final day, I led a closing right of passage event (see Appendix F) and gathered data from the closing questionnaires (see Appendix G). Four to six weeks later, I conducted personal interviews with participants concerning the impact the pilgrimage experience had on their lives (see Appendix H).

Participants

I opened the research project to participants using criteria based on the practical limitations of the event setting. A Christian pilgrimage experience studying people from western New York state required Christian participants who lived in western New York state. In order to avoid controversy over the meaning of being a Christian or the boundaries of western New York state, I asked participants to self-identify themselves as Christians from western New York state. Participants included both laypeople and clergy. Five men and six women paid $100 each to participate in the pilgrimage experience. A

sixth man canceled his participation in the pilgrimage experience just prior to the start due to an unforeseen job conflict. He could not be replaced on short notice.

I determined the number of participants by using three factors: the limitation of housing facilities, logistics, and group interaction. The cabins in Letchworth State Park only accommodate six persons each. Appropriate discretion determined that each cabin should house only one gender. The use of more than two cabins required that I choose two cabins of one gender and only one cabin of the other gender, thus creating an imbalance in gender. In addition, the largest guest house at the Abbey of the Genesee holds a maximum of twenty people. The pilgrimage already needed fifteen beds because the two volunteer assistants and I needed housing as well as the twelve pilgrimage participants. Adding another six people (another full cabin at Letchworth) would be too many people for the Abbey's facilities.

Secondly, logistics drove my desire to work only with a group of up to twelve participants. The difficulty of personally interviewing more than twelve participants one month after the pilgrimage seemed daunting. As I contemplated adding additional participants, the reality of moving more cars, feeding more people, renting more cabins, and coordinating many other logistical matters compounded quickly.

Thirdly, the dynamics of group interaction also helped me decide to choose a group of no more than twelve participants. James S. Atherton, a retired education professor from De Montfort University in Bedford, United Kingdom, notes that twelve people is the upper limit of a small group. Although a group of twelve strains to pick up nonverbal cues due to physical distance among participants, uses more formal speech patterns, and struggles to make sure all members participate, Atherton believes a good

facilitator can still help the group function effectively. I knew my study would be stronger with more participants. I also knew that too many participants would stifle group interaction. Balancing my need for participants with Atherton's findings, I decided that twelve people was the highest number I could study while still maintaining the intimacy, trust, and participation that foster healthy group dynamics.

I actively recruited all eleven subjects from churches affiliated with the Western New York Conference of the United Methodist Church and from churches of other denominations through which I had connections. I disseminated information about the pilgrimage to multiple churches via an e-mail message containing a bulletin announcement soliciting participants (see Appendix A). I also experienced several personal conversations with people who wanted information concerning the subject of my research project. I sent application materials to anyone who expressed a desire to participate (see Appendix B). The first six paid and completed applications received for each gender became the participants in the study. I sent the registration questionnaire to the first six people of each gender who had paid and completed their applications (see Appendix C). I clearly noted that each applicant must submit a completed registration questionnaire upon arrival at the trail head in order to participate in the pilgrimage experience. I placed additional applications obtained on a waiting list in the order in which I received them in case any spaces in the study should become available.

Instrumentation

I chose to use open-ended questionnaires to allow more freedom for the participants to express feelings and information that may not have been discovered with the use of a selected-response questionnaire (Wiersma and Jurs 169). The open-ended

format is also helpful because it allows the participants to answer using their own words (Sommer and Sommer 131). I also chose to use the participant observer model because it is more comprehensive and allows the researcher to observe carefully the greater context in order to gather as much relevant information as possible (Wiersma and Jurs 253).

The open-ended questionnaires helped the participants explore their relationship with God, their Christian identity, their self-defined sense of stress, and the factors they believed influenced those issues. Participants filled out the registration questionnaire (see Appendix C) prior to the start of the pilgrimage and the closing questionnaire (see Appendix G) immediately following the final meal of the pilgrimage on the last day. The personal interview (see Appendix H), which occurred six weeks subsequent to the pilgrimage experience, allowed participants to reflect on longer term impacts of the pilgrimage.

The study also incorporated the ethnographic research technique of participant observation during the pilgrimage experience. I recorded data relevant to the purpose of the study concerning the impact the three-day pilgrimage experience seemed to be having on the participants' understandings of their Christian identity, especially concerning life choices of creating time and space to encounter God.

Researcher-Designed Instruments

I produced researcher-designed questionnaires and interview questions that specifically addressed participants' ideas about relationship with God, Christian identity, and self-defined stress. A few conversations with Dr. Stacy Minger helped me generate ideas for specific questions. From those ideas I created a group of questions that I planned to use on the registration questionnaire, the closing questionnaire, and the final

interviews. I then worked with my mentor, Dr. Donald Joy, to refine and, in some cases, eliminate questions in order to produce better research tools.

Pretest

I gave a pretest of my questionnaires and interview questions to six adult, self-identified Christians from western New York state who did not participate in the pilgrimage experience. I chose pretest participants according to Robert K. Yin's main criteria for selecting people to take part in a pilot case: convenience, access, and geographical proximity (80). The questionnaires and interview questions were further refined and made more understandable according to suggestions made by the people who participated in the pretest. I thoroughly explored each question in order to confirm that the participants understood the meaning and intent of the question in the same manner in which I understood the question's meaning and intent. For example, question #4 on the closing questionnaire asked, "How do you think this pilgrimage experience will impact your choices regarding how you spend your time?" All of the pretest participants confirmed that they understood this question to be asking about both the quality and quantity of their time. The discussion confirmed that the question was not confusing and did not produce results other than what I had expected. In a second example, question #6 on the pretest registration questionnaire asked participants to list the five most important *words* they would use to identify themselves. All of the pretest participants responded to this question as if it were asking for words that described their characters (e.g., flexible, organized) When the term *words* was changed to *roles* as it is in question #6 of the current registration questionnaire (see Appendix C), the participants chose identity role

terms (e.g., mother, teacher), which were consistent with my original meaning and intent for this question.

Variables

The independent variable in this study was the participation in the pilgrimage experience. The dependent variable in this study was the participants' understandings of their Christian identities in relation to life choices of creating time and space to encounter God. This dependent variable had two subcategories: the impact the pilgrimage experience had upon the participants' understanding of their Christian identity and the impact the pilgrimage experience had upon the participants' decisions about life choices concerning the creation of time and space for God in their busy lives.

Control

Although this qualitative research project does not technically involve experimental control, I moderated potentially extraneous and confounding variables primarily by the application process. I controlled for gender by attempting to equalize the number of male and female participants. Participants learned on the application form that the minimum age for participation was 18 years old. Their compliance with this rule allowed me to control for age. I controlled for motivational level by clearly stating that participants must complete the entire application, the registration questionnaire, the closing questionnaire, and the final interview, as well as submit $100 with the application and walk twenty-seven miles over the course of four days.

Reliability and Validity

I established some reliability to this qualitative study by carefully documenting the entire ministry intervention project such that a future researcher could replicate the

pilgrimage experience including the following: the pilgrimage route, the physical setting of nightly camps, the talks and symbolic ceremonies enacted at initial and ending daily gatherings, the group size, and the instruments administered. I strengthened the face validity of the study by submitting my questionnaires and interview questions to a pretest. Using the results of the pretest, I established that the pretest participants understood the meaning and intent of the research tools in the same manner in which I understood the research tool's meaning and intent. The validity of the study was subsequently established internally by determining that pilgrimage participants shared similar conclusions as to their Christian identity and their life choices of creating time and space for God because of the pilgrimage experience.

Data Collection

I mailed, e-mailed, or personally gave applications for the pilgrimage experience to participants who responded to the bulletin announcements by calling, e-mailing, or orally requesting information. Applications included the following sections: personal information, health information, a release of liability waiver, special requirements participants may need, payment information, expectations of pilgrimage participants, logistics, and contact information (see Appendix B). Data collection began with the registration questionnaires, which participants received subsequent to completing the application process (see Appendix C). The small number of participants allowed me to connect with each applicant personally. I emphasized that I must receive their completed registration questionnaires prior to the start of the pilgrimage in order for them to participate. The personal contact and the requirement of the completed questionnaire for participation ensured a 100 percent rate of return on registration questionnaires.

During the pilgrimage experience, I handwrote pertinent observations in the evenings immediately after leaving the presence of the participants. Using triangulation, part of which includes multiple observers, the two logistics helpers assisted me in this recording task by mentally reconstructing the key points of the participants' discussions. The data was recorded out of sight of the participants in order not to hinder their sharing of feelings due to a self-conscious concern about being observed.

I asked participants to complete the closing questionnaires on the final day at the monastery prior to leaving (see Appendix G). After lunch, each participant retired to a quiet place to complete the closing questionnaire. The milieu of everyone working simultaneously helped ensure that I received closing questionnaires from all eleven participants.

I conducted personal interviews with each participant four to six weeks after the pilgrimage experience (see Appendix H). The interviews occurred in the participants' homes or at a meeting point near to their places of residence. During the interviews I sat with each participant and typed their responses onto my laptop computer. I occasionally asked probing questions to help me better understand the depth and meaning of their answers. Most participants were alone when responding, although a few had family members present or in the general vicinity.

I partially funded the research through the participants' $100 dollar application fees. I paid additional costs from my own resources.

Data Analysis

I organized and coded information received from the registration questionnaires, my handwritten field observations, the closing questionnaires, and the texts of the

personal interviews. For each participant, I carefully analyzed the content of their particular data. By comparing multiple sources of evidence, I triangulated the data in order to develop "converging lines of inquiry" (Yin 97), which allowed me to ascertain a fuller understanding of the actual impact of the pilgrimage experience on participants' understandings of their Christian identity in relation to life choices of creating time and space to encounter God. I worked to maintain a "chain of evidence" (102), so the reader could follow data from initial research questions to ultimate conclusions in either direction. I noted the areas in which participants shared a common thread of impact from the pilgrimage experience as well as areas in which participants reacted differently to the pilgrimage experience. I recorded the analysis of the data in Chapter 4.

Ethics

For data collection I maintained a strict confidentiality of all of the participants' oral sharing, answers to questionnaires, and interview data. Concerning the data that the logistics helpers assisted me in recording (observations from participants' oral sharing), I asked the logistics helpers to maintain confidentiality about anything they observed or remembered from the pilgrimage experience.

For data analysis I continued to preserve confidentiality by assuring that I was the only person who saw the collected data. I gathered the written materials myself, and I placed them in secure areas where the materials could not be read by others. I carefully analyzed the data myself and did not consult with anyone else as to the content of the data.

Concerning data reporting, I placed the names of each male participant in a bowl and blindly selected their names in order to create a nonalphabetical, randomized order.

The first name selected received the number MA1. The second name selected received the number MA2. I repeated this process for the five males and, in a separate drawing, for the six females using FE1, FE2, etc. I used the number each participant received to refer to specific responses of participants recorded in the findings of the study in Chapter 4.

For data security I placed the written data in a lockable file cabinet in my home. I also maintained a database of the participant interviews in my computer, which is only accessible through my private password.

This chapter on the design of the research project along with the appendixes creates a paradigm by which to record the impact of the pilgrimage experience on participants' understandings of their Christian identity in relation to life choices of creating time and space to encounter God.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

A frantic, driven lifestyle permeates the North American church. Although Christian identity is clearly grounded in relationship with God, American Christians live frantic lives based not on their status as children of God but on their assumption that identity originates from what they accomplish. Constant activity leaves little room for connecting with God. The purpose of this research project was to study the impact of a three-day pilgrimage experience on the participants' understandings of their Christian identity in relation to life choices of creating time and space to encounter God.

This chapter begins with a description of the participants. After sharing information about the participants, I describe findings that concern the two research questions that guided this project.

Profile of Participants

On the application forms, participants identified themselves as Christians from western New York state. Participants lived in locations spread all across the geography of western New York state. Six participants attended United Methodist churches, two participants attended a Wesleyan church, two participants attended an independent Baptist congregation, and one participant worshiped at an independent Bible church. Ten participants identified themselves as laypeople and one participant identified himself as a clergyperson. Table 1 records basic information concerning the profiles of all participants in the pilgrimage experience. Table 1 lists participants by gender (females first) in the nonalphabetical, randomized order I devised to report the data.

Table 1. Profiles of Participants

Participants	Age	Job	Marital Status	Children Home	Clergy/Lay	Years Christian
FE1	40	Consultant	Married	Yes	Lay	40
FE2	46	Case mgr.	Married	No	Lay	46
FE3	52	Court clerk	Married	No	Lay	11
FE4	51	Teacher	Single	No	Lay	45
FE5	36	Secretary	Married	Yes	Lay	24
FE6	42	Professor	Married	Yes	Lay	10
MA1	46	Student	Married	Yes	Lay	31
MA2	38	Teacher	Married	Yes	Lay	20
MA3	51	Missionary	Married	Yes	Clergy	30
MA4	56	Optometrist	Married	No	Lay	45
MA5	29	Tree service	Married	Yes	Lay	3

In order to determine if discernable patterns in the demographics existed, I split the age category into the five participants who indicated they were aged 29-42 years old and the six participants who marked they were 46-56 years old. In a similar manner, I divided the category dealing with the number of years people claimed to be Christians into the three participants who indicated they were Christians for three to eleven years and the eight participants who marked they were Christians for twenty or more years.

FE1 identified herself as a female layperson, aged 40 years old. FE1 recorded she is married and has two daughters living at home, aged nine and five. FE1 works as a part-time, self-employed marketing consultant in a small city. She noted she has been a Christian her whole life but has not always been active in her faith.

FE2 identified herself as a female layperson, aged 46 years old. FE2 recorded she is married with no children living at home, although she does babysit her infant granddaughter during the day two days a week. FE2 works as a service coordinator/case manager at a local agency. She noted she has been a Christian her whole life, but she has been "reborn" in her faith only in the last few years.

FE3 identified herself as a female layperson ("minister for God—not clergy"), aged 52 years old. FE3 recorded she is married and has no children living at home. FE3 works as a court clerk for New York state. She reported she has been a Christian for around eleven years.

FE4 identified herself as a female layperson, aged 51 years old. FE4 recorded she is single and has no children living at home. FE4 works as a high school science teacher. She reported she has been a Christian around forty-five years. FE4 knows she "gave her heart to Jesus" at a very young age but does not know the date.

FE5 identified herself as a female layperson, aged 36 years old. FE5 recorded she is married (to MA5) and has two children living at home including one who is FE5's teenaged sister. FE5 maintains full responsibility for raising her sister at this time. FE5 works as a secretary at a church. She reported she has been a Christian for twenty-four years.

FE6 identified herself as a female layperson, aged 42 years old. FE6 recorded she is married and has one daughter, aged 9 ½ years old, living at home. FE6 works as a homemaker/mother and an adjunct professor at a local college. FE6 reported she was raised in "minimally Christian household" but, realistically, only began her experience of being a Christian ten years ago when she was baptized as an adult and joined her church.

MA1 identified himself as a male layperson, aged 46 years old. MA1 recorded he is married with two children living at home. MA1 noted he is currently studying as a college student in pursuit of a degree. He reported he has been a Christian his whole life, although he has only actively lived his faith for thirty-one of those forty-six years.

MA2 identified himself as a male layperson, aged 38 years old. MA2 recorded he is married with three children living at home. MA2 works as a middle school teacher. He reported he has been a Christian for twenty years.

MA3 identified himself as a male clergyperson, aged 51 years old. MA3 recorded he is married with one child living at home. MA3 worked as a missionary who, after spending several years in Africa, is currently speaking at conferences, running summer camp activities, and raising funds on which to live. MA3 reported he has been a Christian for thirty years.

MA4 identified himself as a male layperson, aged 56 years old. MA4 recorded he is married with no children living at home. MA4 works as a self-employed optometrist in a small city. He reported he has been a Christian around forty-five years.

MA5 identified himself as a male layperson, aged 29 years old. MA5 recorded he is married with two children living at home, one of whom is the teenaged sister of FE5. MA5 works for a tree service, cutting and trimming trees as needed. He reported he has been a Christian for three years.

Awareness of God and/or Relationship with God

Research Question #1 asked, “How did the participants describe their awareness of God and/or relationship with God before, during, and after the pilgrimage

experience?" I asked this question in order to track participants' potential evolving understanding of their Christian identity through the impact of the pilgrimage experience.

The first seven questions on the Registration Questionnaire helped explore RQ #1 (see Appendix C). Question one on the Registration Questionnaire asked, "Think of a Christian you greatly admire and describe that person." Participants responded naming Christians they admired and listing character traits that described those Christians, including the following: spiritually mature, kind, patient, loving, joyful, serving, committed, peaceful, gentle, disciplined, knowledgeable about God, persevering through adversity, and faithful.

Question two on the Registration Questionnaire asked, "In what ways are you like or unlike the person you just described?" Nine of the eleven participants responded to this question by indicating a general sense of being less faithful than the Christians they described. Compared to the Christians they admired, participants described themselves as less mature, less disciplined, less prayerful, less joyful, less committed, less patient, and less sure of faithfulness in adversity. Concerning a man who would not change his difficult losses in life because those circumstances brought him to faith in Christ, MA4 writes, "I am unsure how I would respond to similar situations." Two of the eleven participants responded by indicating they shared similar characteristics and actions with the Christians they admired. FE3 wrote, "We both had our 'Damascus Road' conversion, we both were over exuberant for the Lord, [and] we both had to step out for a while and let the Lord teach us."

Registration Questionnaire questions one and two were specifically designed to help participants begin to process and express ideas pertaining to their awareness of God

and/or relationship with God. The primary concept revealed in most participants' self-analysis concerned a sense of having not "arrived" compared to the Christians they admired. Five of the eleven participants directly indicated a desire to grow spiritually and become more like their admired Christians. Concerning the remaining six of the eleven participants, despite their lack of stated desire on this particular item, I perceived patterns in answers to other items on the questionnaires as well as interactions on the trail and in the interviews indicating these participants also had a strong desire to grow spiritually.

Question four on the Registration Questionnaire asked participants, "How would you describe your current awareness of God and/or relationship with God?" (see Appendix C). In answer to this question, seven participants described their awareness and/or relationship with God as healthy and growing. One participant expressed a longing for divine guidance, and three participants indicated they struggled to connect with God because of distractions in their lives. As one of the three struggling participants, FE6 wrote, "I'm more in the, 'Oh yeah, God is right over there, I really should stop by and say hi. No time right now; maybe tomorrow' mode." Most participants directly indicated on question four the desire to grow in their awareness of and/or relationship with God. Using triangulation on the multiple sources of evidence gathered in this research project, I saw that every single participant, regardless of how healthy they rated their relationship with God, came to the pilgrimage with a strong desire to grow in their knowledge of and/or connection with God.

Question three on the Registration Questionnaire asked participants, "On a scale of 1-10 (1 = being totally separated, 10 = being totally connected) rate your relationship with God over the last 6 months (give an average rating for that time period) and

carefully explain why you gave yourself this rating" (see Appendix C). Question one on the Closing Questionnaire (see Appendix G) and question one on the Interview Questions (see Appendix H) asked participants virtually the same question except now the measure concerned participants' "current relationship with God," not "relationship with God over the last 6 months." Table 2 indicates the results.

Table 2. Participants' Self-Identified Relationship with God on a 1-10 Scale (1 = Being Totally Separated, 10 = Being Totally Connected)

Participants	6 Months Average Pre-Pilgrimage	Post-Pilgrimage	6 Weeks Post-Pilgrimage
FE1	4	5	7
FE2	6.5	8	7
FE3	6	4	7
FE4	8	8	8
FE5	8	6	7
FE6	5	7.5	7
MA1	6	No answer	6
MA2	5	8	7.5
MA3	7.5	No answer	7
MA4	5	6	6
MA5	7	8	8

Table 2 indicates six participants' self-identified relationships with God increased immediately following and six weeks subsequent to the pilgrimage experience from the prior six-month average. Two participants' numbers remained the same. Two participants' numbers decreased slightly. The final participant's rating (FE3) dropped immediately following the pilgrimage but increased six weeks subsequent to the

pilgrimage. FE3 indicated in her answer on the Closing Questionnaire a different view of the meaning of the 1-10 scale than her view on the Registration Questionnaire. Based on her written response, FE3 increased the demand for giving oneself a higher score on the 1-10 scale. All other indications from her written and oral responses show that FE3 reported meaningful growth in relationship with God from the pilgrimage experience. All four participants who numerically rated their relationships with God as remaining the same or dropping slightly indicated in their written and oral responses that the pilgrimage provided a positive experience that built their relationships with God.

Table 3 displays information gathered from questions two through five on the Registration Questionnaire (see Appendix C), the observed data I gathered during the pilgrimage experience, questions one through five on the Closing Questionnaire (see Appendix G), and questions one through five on the Interview Questions (see Appendix H). Using triangulation, I determined the five major categories of experiences participants identified as helping them grow in their relationship with God prior to the pilgrimage, during the pilgrimage, immediately after the pilgrimage, and six weeks subsequent to the pilgrimage.

Table 3. Number of Participants in Five Major Categories of Experiences Identified as Helping Participants Grow in Their Relationship with God

Categories	Pre-Pilgrimage	During Pilgrimage	Post-Pilgrimage	6 Weeks Post-Pilgrimage
Release from responsibilities	6	6	10	9
Community	6	7	11	11
Spiritual disciplines	11	11	11	11
Nature	1	9	9	5
Suffering	1	5	8	8

Release from Responsibilities

Prior to the pilgrimage, six participants indicated their hope that a release from the multiple responsibilities of home life, child rearing, work schedules, and other tasks would improve their awareness of and/or relationship with God. Demographically, five of the six participants indicated they were younger in age (29-42 years old), five of the six lived in a home with children, and four of the five were female. FE5 hoped that the pilgrimage experience would teach her "how to not let myself be overwhelmed with daily responsibilities which tend to crowd God out." FE1 noted, "I feel like I am caught in a whirlwind of deadlines, appointments, social engagements, work travel, household management, etc. I love my life, but I just don't have time for self-reflection and connecting with my Creator, which I regret."

During the pilgrimage, six participants expressed their belief that the release from responsibilities in their lives created an opportunity to reconnect with God. Four of the six participants indicated they currently lived in a home with children. MA2 shared with

great joy that for the first time in a very long time he possessed “eight unstructured hours” just to walk with God.

In the Closing Questionnaire (see Appendix G), the number of participants indicating that the release from responsibilities helped them grow closer to God rose to ten of the eleven. FE3 wrote of the new insight she gained concerning the need to “slow my schedule down.” Reducing the number of activities and “disconnecting from electronics” struck FE3 as both “doable and good.”

In the final Interview (see Appendix H), nine of the ten participants spoke of the release from responsibilities during the pilgrimage as a powerful learning they gleaned from the experience. MA3, who once spent ten years as a missionary in Africa, indicated the disconnection from the responsibilities of a frantic schedule returned him to the “being” lifestyle he lived in Africa. The pilgrimage allowed him to let go of all the “‘doing’ being thrust upon me on a daily basis.”

Community

The community category described a strong sense among the participants of a need for other Christians to supply support and encouragement along the journey. Prior to the pilgrimage, six participants noted that serving others, learning from others, and being accountable to others helped them grow in their relationship with God. Demographically, five of the six participants indicated they were Christians for more than twenty years, four of the six lived in a home with children, and four of the six were female.

During the pilgrimage seven participants spoke of their deep appreciation for the connection with other pilgrims. Participants noted that as others came alongside them, participants experienced a hopefulness and courage created in the community. FE3

received great encouragement from FE2 who helped FE3 keep walking despite joint pain. MA5 encouraged his wife, FE5, as she struggled to overcome the discomfort of blisters.

Subsequent to the pilgrimage, both immediately and also six weeks later, all eleven pilgrims expressed their conviction that the experience of journeying together in community encouraged them in their awareness of and/or relationship with God. FE1 reported her relationship with her daughter improved. FE4 believed she grew spiritually as God taught her to accept help from others. MA5 noted, "Hearing in group discussions how others were reacting really helped me see the faithfulness of God in others' lives."

Spiritual Disciplines

The spiritual disciplines category incorporated several of the traditional methods by which Christians report an increase in their awareness of and/or relationship with God. Spiritual disciplines noted by participants included the following: prayer, solitude, communion, Scripture reading, Sabbath keeping, singing, discussing theology, seeking God's presence, and just *being* with God. All eleven participants expected to grow in their relationship with God through the practicing of some spiritual discipline while on the pilgrimage. During the pilgrimage, all eleven participants expressed that their connection to God grew. Immediately following and six weeks subsequent to the pilgrimage, all eleven pilgrims indicated spiritual disciplines of some kind played a role in helping them become more aware of and/or relate to God. MA4 described the group discussions about Scripture and journeying as an important boost to his spiritual growth during the pilgrimage. FE2 reported meaningful spiritual growth in her life when FE3 laid hands upon and prayed for FE2 resulting in FE2 receiving important emotional healing concerning the suicide of her father many years before.

Nature

Only one participant (FE6) indicated in her Registration Questionnaire an anticipation of experiencing nature as a means of growing more aware of and/or relating to God. During the pilgrimage, however, the number of participants proclaiming nature as an important tool in growing their relationship with God increased to nine of the eleven. In the Closing Questionnaire immediately following the pilgrimage, the number of participants writing about nature remained at nine of eleven. Six weeks later, however, the Interviews revealed the number of participants talking about nature as a meaningful category decreased to five of eleven. Of the remaining five participants who indicated nature as an important category, four lived in homes with children and four were Christians for twenty years or longer. MA1 indicated the experience of journeying through a natural environment helped him "reconnect with and reprioritize God in my life." A camping trip four weeks subsequent to the pilgrimage reinforced this learning in MA1's life.

Suffering

Only MA4 mentioned suffering prior to the pilgrimage as a means of becoming more aware of and/or growing in relationship with God. MA4 expressed this thought as a reflection of how his friend grew closer to God through a series of difficult family deaths. During the pilgrimage, however, suffering grew in importance in participants' conversations about spiritual growth. Five participants claimed suffering as an experience that was helping draw them closer to God. Of these five participants, four indicated they were Christians twenty years or longer, four marked their ages as 46-56 years old, and four were female. FE4, who sustained terrible blisters, found meaning in suffering:

> I am very independent and struggle with accepting help from others. God used extreme suffering to force me to let people connect with me. I really heard from God, and as a direct result of this pilgrimage, I reached out to others when I came home concerning an upcoming surgery.

During daily gatherings, participants discussed suffering and expressed empathy and concern for FE4 and others who struggled with pain.

Immediately subsequent to the pilgrimage, and six weeks later, eight pilgrims indicated suffering as an important category in growing more aware of and/or closer to God. Of those eight participants, six indicated they were Christians for twenty years or more. Although the demographics split evenly among four males and four females, three of the males indicated, even though they were not personally suffering, the perseverance of participants who found the pilgrimage physically painful inspired the three males in their spiritual lives. MA2 noted his amazement and encouragement through observing others, especially FE4 with her blisters.

Question eight on the Closing Questionnaire asked, “Describe at what point you felt you were able to disengage from your normal responsibilities and become fully engaged in the pilgrimage experience, and explain your answer” (see Appendix G). This question sought to discover the timing of and reasons for participants entering the liminal stage of the pilgrimage. Table 4 indicates the results.

Table 4. Days and Reasons Participants Fully Engaged in Pilgrimage Experience

Participants	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Reason Engaged
FE1		X		Release from responsibilities
FE2		X		Suffering
FE3		X		Suffering
FE4			X	Suffering
FE5		X		Release from responsibilities
FE6	X			Release from responsibilities
MA1	X			Nature
MA2	X			Spiritual discipline (Communion)
MA3	X			Release from responsibilities
MA4	X			Release from responsibilities
MA5	X			Release from responsibilities

Table 4 reveals a striking difference between the males and females. Four of the six females fully engage in the pilgrimage experience on the second day, while one female engages on day one and one female on day three. Conversely, all five of the males report fully engaging in the pilgrimage experience on the first day. Concerning the deciding factor helping them to engage fully, six of the participants cite the release from normal responsibilities, three participants note suffering, one participant reports nature, and one participant records the spiritual discipline of communion, which was administered at the outset of the pilgrimage. Entering liminality remains an important piece of information because it reveals when and why participants become most available to grow in their awareness of and/or relationship with God.

Question six of the Research Questionnaire (see Appendix C), the Closing Questionnaire (see Appendix G), and the Interview Questions (see Appendix H) asked participants, "List the five most important roles which you would use to identify yourself." I asked participants to list these roles because it reveals the primary ways in which participants think about themselves and express their identity to others. Table 5 indicates when in their responses participants stated their identity in Christian terms such as the following: child of God, disciple, Christian servant, Christian, and follower of Jesus Christ.

Table 5. Participants Noting "Child of God" (or Similar Phrase) as One of Five Most Important Roles Participants Use to Identify Themselves

Participants	Pre-Pilgrimage	Post-Pilgrimage	6 Weeks Post-Pilgrimage
FE1	Yes	Yes (2 roles)	Yes
FE2	Yes	Yes (5 roles)	Yes
FE3	Yes	Yes (2 roles)	Yes (2 roles)
FE4	Yes (2 roles)	Yes (2 roles)	Yes (2 roles)
FE5	No	Yes	Yes
FE6	Yes	Yes (2 roles)	Yes (3 roles)
MA1	Yes	Yes (3 roles)	Yes
MA2	Yes	Yes	Yes
MA3	Yes (2 roles)	Yes (2 roles)	Yes (2 roles)
MA4	No	Yes	Yes
MA5	No	No	Yes

Eight of the eleven participants used "child of God," or a similar Christian identifying term, in describing their identity in the Registration Questionnaire. Ten of the

eleven participants used a Christian identifying term in the Closing Questionnaire. During the interviews six weeks later, all eleven participants chose to identify themselves as a "child of God" or some similar term.

Seven of the eleven participants chose more than one Christian term to express their identity. For example, MA3 described himself as a "faithful follower of Jesus Christ" and a "missionary" in his Registration Questionnaire. While two participants used multiple Christian terms to identify themselves prior to the pilgrimage, seven used multiple Christian terms in the Closing Questionnaire, and four participants identified themselves with more than one Christian term in the interview. FE2 identified herself as a "child of God" for all five roles on her Closing Questionnaire but then only once in her interview.

During the pilgrimage, participants talked freely about identity issues within group discussions and in pairs on the trail. Participants contemplated questions such as, "Who am I at my core?" and, "What does it mean to be a spiritual pilgrim?" FE2 noted that the "empty nest" situation at home (her children having all moved away) revealed fresh insights on the question of, "Who am I?" FE6 said in a group discussion, "We don't tend to define ourselves theologically because the things of this world are so tangible that they make the spiritual things seem distant." FE1 noted, "When Abraham became a nomad, he became a 'nobody' to his society."

Question seven of the Research Questionnaire (see Appendix C), the Closing Questionnaire (see Appendix G), and the Interview Questions (see Appendix H) asked participants to describe how their five most important identifying roles influenced how participants choose to spend their time. Triangulating the various data sources indicates

four participants showed virtually no change in how they spend their time. Two of these four participants indicate a healthy lifestyle, which incorporates a balanced approach to time management and making time for God. The remaining seven participants indicate changes in their time usage based on their identity as children of God. The married couple, FE5 and MA5, intentionally established a Sabbath rest into their busy lifestyles. They love the time with God and the freedom from work on Sundays, and they claim the pilgrimage as influencing this decision. MA2 plans to incorporate a yearly, Memorial Day weekend pilgrimage to the Abbey of the Genesee. He looks forward to "alone time" and the power of the pilgrimage experience to render him "totally refreshed, renewed, rejuvenated, and revived."

Research Question #1 asked, "How did the participants describe their awareness of God and/or relationship with God before, during, and after the pilgrimage experience?" Participants' answers to questions one through seven on the Registration Questionnaire (see Appendix C), questions one through seven of the Interview Questions (see Appendix H), and questions one through eight on the Closing Questionnaire (see Appendix G) reveal meaningful liminal experiences during the pilgrimage resulting in most participants reporting an impact from before the pilgrimage to after the pilgrimage of increased self-identification as children of God, increased time spent with God, and increased awareness of and/or relationship with God.

Self-Identified Level of Stress

Research Question #2 asked, "What was the self-identified level of stress in the participants before, during, and after the pilgrimage experience?" I asked this question to

shed light on how the stress of various life choices of creating time and space to encounter God shapes and is shaped by participants' understandings of Christian identity.

Questions eight and ten on the Registration Questionnaire (see Appendix C) ask participants to, "Describe a stressful experience in the last four weeks." and, "Describe the major stressors in your life." Participants' answers revealed six major categories of stress in their lives. Table 6 indicates the results of the data.

Table 6. Participants' Six Major Self-Identified Categories of Stress in Life

Participants	Family/Parenting	Work	Illness	Marriage	Schedule	Money
FE1	X	X	X	X	X	
FE2	X	X				
FE3		X			X	
FE4		X			X	
FE5	X	X				
FE6	X	X	X	X		
MA1		X	X			X
MA2	X					
MA3		X				X
MA4	X	X				X
MA5					X	

Table 6 reveals that stress from family/parenting and work issues occurs in the participants' lives much more often than the other four categories. Six participants reported family/parenting experiences as major stressors. Of these six participants, four identified themselves in the younger group (29-42 years old), four lived in homes with

children, four were Christians for twenty years or longer, and four were female. Nine participants reported work issues as a major stressor. Two females, both of whom identify themselves in the younger group (29-42 years old) and both of whom live in a home with children, report four or more categories of major stress. Two males, both of whom identify themselves in the younger group (29-42 years old) and both of whom live in a home with children, report only one major life stressor.

Question eleven on the Registration Questionnaire asked participants, "On a scale of 1-10 (1 = not being stressed at all, 10 = being excessively stressed) rate your average stress level over the last 6 months and carefully explain why you gave yourself this rating" (see Appendix C). Question twelve on the Registration Questionnaire (see Appendix C), question ten on the Closing Questionnaire (see Appendix G), and question nine on the Interview Questions (see Appendix H) asked participants similar questions except now the measure concerned participants' "current stress level," not "average stress level over the last 6 months." Table 7 indicates the results.

Table 7. Participants' Self-Identified Levels of Stress on a 1-10 Scale (1 = Not Being Stressed at All, 10 = Being Excessively Stressed)

Participants	6 Months Average Pre-Pilgrimage	Pre-Pilgrimage	Post-Pilgrimage	6 Weeks Post-Pilgrimage
FE1	5	5	3	5
FE2	7	7	2.5	5
FE3	5	3	2.5	4
FE4	8	3	3	3
FE5	6	9	2	1
FE6	6.5	3.5	2	2.5
MA1	8	4	2	5
MA2	3	3	3	2.5
MA3	2.5	3	4	4
MA4	5	6	2	6
MA5	2	1	2	1

Table 7 reveals that eight of the eleven participants reported an overall decrease in their self-identified levels of stress from before the pilgrimage to six weeks subsequent to the pilgrimage. No other gathered demographics appeared meaningful for this group. Seven of the eleven participants reported a decrease in self-identified stress levels immediately following the pilgrimage. Of these seven participants, five identified themselves as Christians of twenty years or more. MA5 indicated the only reason his level increased one point at the end of the pilgrimage was because of the long car trip and the list of duties awaiting him immediately upon arrival at home that evening. During the interviews six weeks after the pilgrimage, six of the participants indicated their self-identified stress levels increased subsequent to the end of the pilgrimage. Of these six

participants, five identified themselves as Christians of twenty years or more, four reported their ages in the older group (46-56 years old), and four were females.

Question nine on the Registration Questionnaire (see Appendix C), question nine on the Closing Questionnaire (see Appendix G), and question eight of the Interview Questions (see Appendix H) asked participants to discuss their self-care practices and the impact the pilgrimage experience would have on those self-care practices. Six of the eleven participants indicated some change in their self-care practices because of the pilgrimage experience. FE3 increased rest and exercise and embarked on eating more healthily. FE4 intentionally spent time with more Christian friends and found support for her surgery. FE5 started taking a Sabbath rest, increased her exercise, and lost ten pounds. She also resolved to take two consecutive days off in order to enjoy a larger block of time away from the stress of her job. MA2 planned to increase his revitalizing "alone time" by participating in an annual pilgrimage. MA3 increased his exercise time as well as time spent walking with his wife. Finally, MA5 joined his wife (FE5) in taking a Sabbath rest.

Question eleven on the Closing Questionnaire (see Appendix G) and question ten of the Interview Questions (see Appendix H) asked participants, "How do you think this pilgrimage experience will impact your future stress levels?" Seven of the eleven participants anticipated future stress levels to be lower. Five of those seven participants identified themselves as Christians for twenty years or more, five lived in homes with children, five were female, and five reported reduced stress specifically because of less worry and greater inner peace that was gained on the pilgrimage experience. FE5 indicated she feels God cared for her through the pain of walking during the pilgrimage

and that care has increased her trust in God. Reflecting on the touchstone experience of the pilgrimage, she claimed to have experienced very little anxiety in the subsequent six weeks. She noted, “I did not realize before the pilgrimage how much responsibility I was lugging around as baggage.” FE6 initially assumed that her reduced stress would quickly increase again as it has after other retreats. Instead, she continued to experience less stress because, on the pilgrimage, she reconnected to her own identity as a child of God and not just her husband’s wife or her daughter’s mother. She notes, “I expect continued lower stress levels because I have found peace about who I am and how I relate to God.”

Research Question #2 asked, “What was the self-identified level of stress in the participants before, during, and after the pilgrimage experience?” Participants’ answers to questions eight through twelve on the Registration Questionnaire (see Appendix C), questions nine through eleven on the Closing Questionnaire (see Appendix G), and questions eight through eleven of the Interview Questions (see Appendix H) reveal major categories of stress (especially family/parenting and work issues), an overall decrease in most participants’ self-identified levels of stress, a change in self-care practices for many participants, and an expectation by many participants of lower stress levels in the future.

Meaningful Lesson for Each Participant

Each participant reported a meaningful lesson gleaned from the pilgrimage experience. FE1 described as a “huge gift” the realization that “no big epiphany or transformation is necessarily needed to grow with God. I can be me. I can connect with God in my current life.” FE2 found unexpected peace of mind concerning her unresolved feelings about her father’s suicide when she was a teenager. “God wanted me on the pilgrimage to deal with the suicide of my father. [FE3’s] prayer for healing was so

important to me." FE3 noted the pilgrimage helped her be less stressed about control and money. "Less of me and more of God equals less stress in life." FE4 marveled at how quickly her usual repulsion at being helped by others dissipated in the pain of her blistered feet. "When I heard people were praying for me, I just relaxed into that instead of fighting it." She noted that God used the physical pain to help her act on what she already knew about her need for community. FE5 claimed the radical reduction of stress in her life remained her greatest lesson from the pilgrimage. She used the pilgrimage as a touchstone experience by which to receive encouragement concerning the trustworthiness of God. FE6 noted her attitude shift concerning her identity gave her significant peace. Faced with a still busy schedule, she reflects, "It's not so much about getting away from my responsibilities on a permanent basis, as it is moving toward God in the midst of my responsibilities."

MA1 realized afresh the power of nature to reconnect him to God and reprioritize God in his life. MA2 declared, "You can't put words on an experience like this." He solidified his commitment to do an annual pilgrimage on the same weekend, involving physical movement, natural surroundings, solitude, Bible study, and a visit to the Abbey of the Genesee. MA3 reconnected with his less stressful "African" lifestyle. The release from responsibilities helped him let go of so much *doing* and reminded him how to practice simply *being*. MA4 also found the release from responsibilities meaningful. He believed the pilgrimage reinforced his already existing relationship with God in a manner that truly rejuvenated him. Finally, MA5 adopted the practice of observing the Sabbath. He noted that keeping the Sabbath helped build his relationship with God by providing more time to spend reading the Bible and connecting with God.

Summary of Major Findings

This study revealed several major findings.

All eleven participants encountered a meaningful liminal experience in the pilgrimage resulting in an opportunity to grow deeper in their awareness of and/or relationship with God.

All eleven participants, even those four who numerically rated their relationships with God as remaining the same or dropping slightly, indicated in their written and oral responses that the pilgrimage provided a positive experience that increased their awareness of and/or relationship with God.

The five major categories of experiences participants identified as helping them grow in their relationship with God from before the pilgrimage to after the pilgrimage were release from responsibilities, community, spiritual disciplines, nature, and suffering.

All eleven participants identified themselves as children of God subsequent to the pilgrimage experience. For eight of the eleven participants, this self-identification as children of God revealed an evolving understanding of their Christian identity from before the pilgrimage to after the pilgrimage.

Seven of eleven participants indicated increased time spent with God based on their identity as children of God.

The six major self-identified categories of stress in life for participants were family/parenting, work, illness, marriage, schedule, and money.

Eight of the eleven participants reported an overall decrease in their self-identified levels of stress from before the pilgrimage to six weeks subsequent to the pilgrimage.

Six of the eleven participants indicated some positive change in their self-care practices because of the pilgrimage experience.

Seven of the eleven participants anticipated lower future stress levels as a result of participating in the pilgrimage experience.

This chapter completes the report on the major findings of the research project. Chapter 5 provides an analysis and interpretation of the major research findings as well as implications, limitations, unexpected observations, and recommendations for further inquiry.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

In the spring, summer, and autumn of 1990, I traveled with God on a holy pilgrimage that changed my life forever. Hiking the Appalachian Trail constituted more than a backpacking trip. I lived the life of a pilgrim who felt called to journey, empowered to overcome suffering, strengthened to live outdoors, and challenged to travel with Christ to a spiritually meaningful place, awe-inspiring Mount Katahdin. My pilgrimage served as a tangible experience that taught me to prioritize what was most important and leave behind the rest, whether good or bad. The hike helped me by grounding my identity as a follower of Jesus Christ, a traveling pilgrim holding lightly the things of this world. I gladly learned to cut out unnecessary baggage and activity in order to create time and space to encounter God.

As I searched the Scriptures, I realized God's plan for this world constantly involves a process of movement toward fulfillment. From the creation in Genesis to the final consummation in Revelation, everyone and everything participates in the journey of life. God's actions display the eternal movement that exists at the core of God's loving, missional, sending nature. God always moves in love towards the world. God himself embraced pilgrimage when Jesus Christ embarked upon the journey of human life in order to renew God's relationship with humankind.

As a pastor seeking to help my western New York state parishioners grow in their relationships with God, I wondered if pilgrimage might be a tool for shaping Christians by reconnecting them with spiritually healthy understandings of Christian identity and life choices. I surmised that taking time out of a frantic lifestyle to participate in a

pilgrimage experience, which included discussions on the theology of the pilgrim identity, might serve to remind Christians of their identity as children of God called to join the greater journey of faith in which God is the central pilgrim. Perhaps if people better understood that their identities are grounded in their relationships with God, they would not feel obligated to fill their lives with the stress of multiple activities in order to produce accomplishments upon which to build their identities.

An opportunity for research for a doctoral degree provided the perfect chance to study pilgrimage in depth. A review of the literature quickly revealed pilgrimage provides a metaphor for life, retains a long and storied history of spiritual nurture within Christianity as well as other religions, incorporates anthropological elements of liminality and rite of passage, counteracts the frantic North American lifestyle, and rejuvenates pilgrims in powerful natural settings. Existing research also demonstrates that short-term, liminal, outdoor-influenced experiences produce important growth in participants.

Building on the foundation of my personal experience, biblical and theological reflection, and the literature surrounding pilgrimage, I designed a ministry intervention project to study the impact of a three-day pilgrimage experience on the participants' understandings of their Christian identity in relation to life choices of creating time and space to encounter God. In the following discussion, I explore the major findings of my research project, sharing insights that contribute to the overall knowledge and understanding of the experience of pilgrimage. I also consider implications of my research, explain limitations of the study, note unexpected observations, and make recommendations for applying my findings to ministry contexts. I conclude with a postscript of some personal thoughts.

Major Findings

This study revealed several major findings.

Meaningful Liminal Experience

All eleven participants encountered a meaningful liminal experience in the pilgrimage resulting in an opportunity to grow deeper in their awareness of and/or relationship with God. This first major finding coincides with Scandrett-Leatherman's description of the liminal stage in rites of passage in which participants gain new understanding about identity and status (313). Turner notes the liminal stage is ambiguous in nature, thus breaking down societal barriers that might normally keep participants from gaining new wisdom (95). Pilgrimage participants learned and grew because they experienced genuine liminality.

Abraham needed to leave behind his home and people, enter the Promised Land, and travel all the way to Shechem before God appeared to him in person (theophany). God knew Abraham must be fully involved in the liminal stage before God deemed him ready for a personal encounter. God also required the ancient Hebrews to participate in three pilgrimages every year. These pilgrimages, during which the Psalms of Ascent were sung, undoubtedly offered meaningful spiritual growth opportunities because of their liminal nature.

I asked participants to leave all electronics at home (except for their cell phones for emergencies only) in order to help participants enter a meaningful liminal stage. Constant reconnection to the culture disallows full engagement in the experience. Scandrett-Leatherman notes that liminality succeeds if rituals occur during the separation and reincorporation stages (313). Venable wondered if his rituals would have produced

greater growth if his campers recognized the rituals as sacred in nature (72). Because of the need for ritual and because of Venable's concern that ritual be recognized as sacred, I incorporated the sacrament of communion into my separation ritual and the rite of "remembering your baptism" into my reincorporation ritual. Participants considered both rituals sacred events. MA2 even claimed he "fully engaged in the process" during communion.

My data reports all eleven participants entered liminality, and six of the eleven participants entered liminality because of their release from responsibilities. Using triangulation, the data also attests that of the remaining five participants three specifically reported that release from responsibilities constituted an important part of their pilgrimage. This data confirms that disconnection from normal activities created important opportunities for liminality and, thus, growth. The data also reveals that, while most of the women took a day or more to enter liminality, all of the men reported full engagement on day one. The data provides possible insight into differences between males and females in terms of their ability to focus on situations and disconnect from outside circumstances. Perhaps males, who tend to focus their identity on their work, which is more impersonal, are more able to disengage from work quickly compared to females, who tend to ground their identity in relationships, which are more personal, and, perhaps, find separation from those relationships more difficult. The stark difference in my data between males and females seems reminiscent of the implications of studies on divided (male) versus linked (female) brain hemispheres.

The data may also reveal a limitation to the self-reporting instrumentation of my research project. Turner's discussion of liminality notes the objective nature of the

liminal experience (95). Everyone who participates in certain functions necessarily enters liminality, regardless of whether or not they are aware of its reality. Question eight, however, on the Closing Questionnaire (see Appendix G) asked participants to report when they *felt* they had fully engaged in the pilgrimage. This question measures the subjective awareness of the participant's entrance into liminality, which might be very different from the objective reality of when the participant actually entered the liminal stage.

Increased Awareness of and/or Relationship with God

All eleven participants, even those four who numerically rated their relationships with God as remaining the same or dropping slightly, indicated in their written and oral responses that the pilgrimage provided a positive experience that increased their awareness of and/or relationship with God. This second major finding coincides with the testimony of Scripture. God himself calls Abraham into a life of pilgrimage, commands the ancient Hebrews to participate in pilgrimage three times a year, inspires the writer of Hebrews to encourage Christians by the example of the sojourning patriarchs, and even enters pilgrimage himself, in the person of Jesus Christ, by coming and living as a human on earth. As Bruce points out, God even chooses to identify himself to others as the God of pilgrims (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; 299). If God values pilgrimage this much, surely God views pilgrimage as a positive experience that draws people closer to him.

Literature covering the history of pilgrimage within the Christian tradition also recognizes the value and power of pilgrimage in helping people connect with God. John Wilkinson notes that pilgrimage to holy places began extremely early in the life of the church (43). Simon Coleman and John Elsner note that pilgrimage became a standard

feature in the life of most persons who would later be seen as saints (91). Though pilgrimage has struggled through some difficult times of abuse (e.g., the crusades), the vast majority of Christians over two millennia have cherished pilgrimage as a powerful spiritual formation tool.

All eleven participants in my study indicated that pilgrimage increased their awareness of and/or relationship with God. Four of the eleven did not report this finding directly, but, based on triangulation, this finding became extremely obvious. For example, FE5, whose rating on Table 2 (see page 73) implied her awareness of and/or relationship with God was less after than before the pilgrimage, also noted in her interview, "The pilgrimage has definitely caused spiritual growth. My trust in God has increased because if he got me through that, he won't abandon me in a new challenge." The data from my research joins a large body of literature affirming pilgrimage as a valuable experience that draws people closer to God.

Spiritual Growth-Building Experiences

The five major categories of experiences participants identified as helping them grow in their relationship with God from before the pilgrimage to after the pilgrimage were release from responsibilities, community, spiritual disciplines, nature, and suffering. This statement establishes the study's third major finding. Table 3 (see page 75) shows that while six participants indicated release from responsibilities as an important category prior to and during the pilgrimage, ten (and six weeks later, nine) participants listed it as an important category following the pilgrimage. Participants grew in their understanding that disconnection with normal activities serves to open people to spiritual growth. MA1 wrote nothing about this category in his registration questionnaire, but noted in his

follow-up interview that the retreat from his frantic lifestyle, which the pilgrimage provided, helped him gain perspective on his need to prioritize God. This finding coincides with Scandrett-Leatherman's research, which shows that "anti-structure," which involves a disconnection from all normal activities and possessions by which people mark their status, is a crucial part of liminality and helps open people up to new growth (314). Interestingly, five of the six participants who noted this category prior to the pilgrimage identified themselves as living in a home with children. This finding may reflect the often demanding responsibilities of people who must juggle raising children with other important needs including personal spiritual growth. The fact that half of the participants did not anticipate this category may imply blindness to frantic lifestyle as a hindrance to spiritual growth. The fact that almost all of the participants noted this category after the pilgrimage may indicate the power of liminality to teach proper prioritization of spiritual growth over a busy lifestyle. Less, indeed, is more.

Participants also grew in their understanding of community as a category to help nurture spiritual growth. Table 3 (see page 75) shows that while prior to the pilgrimage only six participants spoke of community as important, following the pilgrimage all eleven noted it as important. Theologians such as Seamands (160-64), Bevans and Schroeder (287), and Moltmann (64) have discerned the critical aspect of community in the theological concept of God as Trinity. The three persons of the Godhead exist in such intimate community that God is one. Venable and Joy describe community as one of the critical elements of journeying together. By its very nature, journeying encourages dependence upon God and other pilgrims (104). My data indicates pilgrimage may be a means of teaching the importance of community to North American Christians who tend

to think of their spiritual lives in an individualistic manner. Five of the six participants who, prior to the pilgrimage, anticipated community as an important growth category indicated they were Christians for twenty or more years. This finding may reflect a sensitivity to the need for Christian community that grows through experience to overcome individualistic tendencies.

Table 3 (see page 75) indicates that all eleven participants described the use of spiritual disciplines as important in growing their relationship with God prior, during, and following the pilgrimage. I assume that because all participants identified themselves as Christians, their participation in a church community consistently brings them into contact with basic ideas of growth in relationship with God through spiritual disciplines, including: worship, prayer, communion, and time spent with God. Participants voluntarily sought to involve themselves in the pilgrimage experience. This reality indicates a spiritual hunger of some degree. God's call in Abraham's life did not force obedience upon Abraham. Abraham followed God's call because Abraham wanted to follow it. Pemberton notes that present-day pilgrims seek the ancient pilgrimage paths and destinations because the spiritual discipline of pilgrimage inspires them (52-60). My data confirms that people interested in growing closer to God expect beforehand, and report afterward, experiences such as pilgrimages involve spiritual disciplines as a crucial factor in spiritual growth.

Participants also grew in their understanding of the natural world as a category to help nurture spiritual growth. Table 3 (see page 75) shows that while prior to the pilgrimage only one participant spoke of nature as important, during and following the pilgrimage nine participants noted it as important. Interestingly, six weeks subsequent to

the pilgrimage, only five participants remembered nature as meaningful. Hunter notes that medieval Celtic Christians recognized the power of nature to draw people closer to God (86-88). The Bible provides numerous examples of God using the wilderness as a crucible to form his people including, as B. Lane notes, the Exodus (44-45). I believe my data reflects a disconnect with the natural world that exists for many postmodern people. Separation from the land promotes unawareness of nature's power. In the midst of the pilgrimage, however, participants' recognition of nature's ability to draw people closer to God increases dramatically. Six weeks later, fully reengaged in their mostly indoor lives, some participants forget the lesson.

Finally, participants grew in their understanding of suffering as a category to help nurture spiritual growth. Table 3 (see page 75) shows that while prior to the pilgrimage only one participant spoke of suffering as important, during the pilgrimage this number grew to five participants, and following the pilgrimage eight participants noted it as important. Four of the five participants who spoke of suffering during the pilgrimage indicated they were in the older participant category (ages 46-56). This finding appeared to reflect the physical difficulty they experienced compared to most of the younger (ages 29-42) participants. B. Lane notes that God chose to bring the Hebrews through the wilderness because it would be more difficult (44-45). Brancatelli notes that overcoming suffering renders his youth pilgrimage projects more effective (1). Suffering produced meaningful learning for several participants, especially FE4 who found a greater openness to community because of her physical struggle. My data suggests, perhaps in a manner counterintuitive to the comfort-oriented culture of North America, spiritual

leaders' abilities to help Christians embrace suffering might promote growth in Christians' relationships with God.

Increased Self-Identification as Children of God

All eleven participants identified themselves as children of God subsequent to the pilgrimage experience. For eight of the eleven participants, this self-identification as children of God revealed an evolving understanding of their Christian identity from before the pilgrimage to after the pilgrimage. This fourth major finding reflects directly on one element of the purpose of my research project, namely, the impact of a three-day pilgrimage experience on the participants' understandings of their Christian identity. The book of Hebrews speaks of the patriarchs as sojourners who knew this world was not their true home. In a similar manner, the thousands of mendicants living in medieval Europe provided tangible examples of Christians who lived their lives in permanent pilgrimage as a reminder of their true identity (Bevans and Schroeder 159).

Initially, eight of the eleven pilgrimage participants claimed "child of God" (or a similar term) as one of their five most important roles on the registration questionnaire. This finding seems obvious considering all eleven participants identified themselves as Christians. The fact that immediately following the pilgrimage ten pilgrims wrote "child of God" (or a similar term) and seven of them identified more than one role in this category implies that the pilgrimage brought theological identification to the forefront of their understanding of personal identity. During the final interview, I worked very hard at asking questions and probing in ways that did not imply I wanted certain answers. As a researcher I attempted to discover what the participants truly thought about their identity versus what they thought I wanted them to think. The interview revealed that all eleven

participants listed “child of God” (or a similar term) as one of their top five roles, and four participants gave more than one role in this category. My data suggests that going on a pilgrimage, with all of its spiritual formation practices, creates an impact of increased understanding of Christian identity among most participants.

Increased Time Spent with God

Seven of eleven participants indicated increased time spent with God based on their identity as children of God. This statement establishes the study’s fifth major finding. The existence of three yearly pilgrimages to Jerusalem for the ancient Hebrews implies that those who identify themselves as the children of God will intentionally participate in activities that draw them into closer relationship with God. George E. Gingras confirms that Christians throughout the ages have actively participated in pilgrimage to cultivate their spiritual lives (11-17). My data implies that most people who increase their understanding of their Christian identity will reflect that understanding in their life choices of creating time and space to encounter God. Seven participants reported increased time spent with God. Two of the additional participants reported no increase in time because of an already existing, strong Christian identity along with substantial time and space in their lives to encounter God. Only two participants indicated a relatively limited amount of time and space in their lives for God and, despite an increased sense of Christian identity, not much intention to increase their time spent with God.

Categories of Stress in Life

The six major self-identified categories of stress in life for participants were family/parenting, work, illness, marriage, schedule, and money. The most interesting

demographic information concerning this sixth major finding relates to work. Nine of the eleven participants reported work as a major category of stress in their lives. Florence R. Kluckhohn notes that Americans place ultimate significance on *doing*. The importance of achieving visible accomplishments dominates virtually all aspects of American life (17). God gave work as a gift that allows humans to reflect God's character through creativity and production; however, as the life of Abraham attests, accomplishments in activities are often far less important than relationships. Following the call of God, Abraham adopted a life of wandering. He accomplished virtually nothing other than maintaining a household of nomadic shepherds. The world knows Abraham not because of his work but because of his relationship with God. That relationship caused Abraham to become the father of many nations.

My data reflects that work produces the most stress in the participants' lives. Triangulation reveals that some of the stress concerns relationships, some concerns uncertainty about the future, and some reflects overworking tendencies or pressures. Work, however, is not as important as relationship with God. For those who struggle with overworking tendencies, pilgrimage offers a tangible reminder that Christian identity is much more connected to relationship with God than accomplishment of tasks.

Decrease in Levels of Stress

Eight of the eleven participants reported an overall decrease in their self-identified levels of stress from before the pilgrimage to six weeks subsequent to the pilgrimage. Six of these eight participants reported that, while their overall stress level was lower after six weeks, the six-week level had risen slightly from an even lower level immediately following the pilgrimage. This seventh major finding implies the return to "life as usual"

reintroduced stressors that increased participants' stress levels, but some change occurred in participants' "normal lives" that managed to help those stress levels remain lower than before the pilgrimage.

Venable and Joy suggest the simplified lifestyle, which nature forces upon journeyers, tests and refines life's priorities, thus teaching pilgrims to hold onto only the bare necessities (104). Coinciding with Venable and Joy, some participants reported their reduction in stress occurred because of simplification of lifestyle (e.g., FE5's and MA5's newly found Sabbath-keeping practices). For other participants, reduction of stress seems linked to a new attitude of trust in God that the pilgrimage provided. FE6 demonstrated this attitude shift when she noted, "It's not so much getting away from my responsibilities on a permanent basis, as it is moving toward God in the midst of my responsibilities." The next major finding sheds light on how some participants managed to change their lives to create lower stress.

Positive Changes in Self-Care Practices

Six of the eleven participants indicated some positive change in their self-care practices because of the pilgrimage experience. Changes involved improved diet, increased exercise, more time spent with family or supporting friends, more time spent resting from work (Sabbath keeping), and more time spent alone with God (walking and planned pilgrimage). This eighth major finding implies that pilgrimage produces an opportunity for participants to reevaluate their life priorities in order to produce a healthier existence. God blessed Abraham for reprioritizing his life around God instead of family and home. Abraham left familiar territory and, perhaps more importantly, Abraham left his father's family. He wandered for twenty-five years with neither father

nor son, a difficult psychological burden for an ancient Near Eastern male (Wenham 278). God blessed Abraham greatly because Abraham chose God over family. The pilgrimage of Abraham taught him faith in God to meet all his needs. Despite ample opportunity, Abraham never returned home from his pilgrimage. He embarked upon a pilgrimage, and it changed his life forever.

Anticipated Lower Future Stress Levels

Seven of the eleven participants anticipated lower future stress levels as a result of participating in the pilgrimage experience. This ninth major finding reflects the gift of hope that pilgrimage offers. A new experience creates new insights about the future. God created a world constantly moving toward fulfillment. Pilgrimage tangibly reminds Christians of the greater journey of life that will consummate in the kingdom of heaven. Life will not remain the same.

Of the seven participants, five reported reduced stress specifically because of less worry and greater inner peace that was gained on the pilgrimage experience. This finding suggests that while pilgrimage does not guarantee change, it provides an opportunity for change in participants' attitudes concerning their ability to trust God.

Summary of Major Findings

The purpose of this research project was to study the impact of a three-day pilgrimage experience on the participants' understandings of their Christian identity in relation to life choices of creating time and space to encounter God. The major findings of this study demonstrate the power of pilgrimage, with its liminal qualities, to increase participants' awareness of and/or relationship with God through episodes involving release from responsibilities, participation in intimate Christian community, the practice

of spiritual disciplines, interaction with natural settings, and the experience of suffering. Participants' increasing awareness of and/or relationship with God seems to coincide with a growing understanding of their Christian identity, which, for some, affects life choices including the creation of more time and space in their lives to encounter God.

Some participants report pilgrimage reduces their current level of stress. Some participants also anticipate their reduction in stress to continue in the future. Reduction of stress seems linked to some participants' positive changes in their self-care practices (i.e., life choices), which creates more time and space in their lives to encounter God. For other participants, reduction of stress seems more linked to meaningful encounters with God on pilgrimage, which, in turn, create attitudinal changes that increase the participants' trust in God, thus resulting in lower stress.

Implications

The results of this study demonstrate that pilgrimage is a useful tool to increase spiritual growth among Christians. Temporarily disconnecting from the normal routine to walk to a spiritually meaningful place may not seem like good time management, but the potential rejuvenation of the spiritual life of the pilgrim renders the trip worthwhile. Pilgrimage participants report meaningful increases in their awareness of and/or relationship with God simply by embarking on the journey.

Protestants need no longer hold onto Reformation-influenced judgments about the efficacy of pilgrimage. Crusaders and other medieval pilgrims may have abused the process, but pilgrimage itself contains nothing inherently negative that renders it any less useful than other legitimate spiritual growth practices, which have occasionally been abused in their own ways. Roman Catholics can testify to the powerfully valuable lessons

learned while on pilgrimage. The Church universal needs every tool God has provided in order to continue to grow in love for God and humanity.

Three days is enough time to create a meaningful impact. Research suggests the longer people participate in liminal experiences the more lasting the outcome. This reality, however, need not discourage busy people who only possess a few days to disconnect from their normal routines to participate in pilgrimage. ME5 noted that the pilgrimage reminded him of the Walk to Emmaus three-day retreats, which have helped him grow spiritually. All eleven participants in this study testified that going on pilgrimage for three days produced a meaningful spiritual growth opportunity that helped them grow in their awareness of and/or relationship with God.

Understanding the nature of Christian identity is important to producing mature followers of Jesus Christ. Those who do not yet understand that Christians are sojourners, not settlers, in this world have failed to grasp the true understanding of the Christian life. Christians should hold lightly the things of this world. Nothing is more important than following God wherever he calls. Anything that hinders the spiritual walk remains a potential idol until it falls in line behind Christ in importance.

Contributions to future research might involve a study of how learning styles affect peoples' response to pilgrimage. What learning styles have a more natural inclination to learn through nature? What learning styles learn better kinesthetically? What would be the impact on pilgrimage studies that screened for people who learn more easily through group process than individual methods?

Adding the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator or some other personality assessment tool would produce interesting data concerning the connection between personality types

and the impact of pilgrimage. Do some personalities grow through pilgrimage more than others? Would some personalities enjoy pilgrimage more than others? Are some personalities more attracted to pilgrimage than others?

A study of the difference between males' abilities and females' abilities to enter quickly into liminality would be helpful. Perhaps researchers could develop separate pilgrimages for males and females, which accommodate for potential differences between the genders. My results suggested that males tend to enter liminality more quickly, but my sample is too small to suggest any broad generalizations.

Measuring the impact of pilgrimages of different time lengths or different natural environments might prove useful. Does the impact of pilgrimage plateau after a certain length of time beyond which additional time no longer creates greater impact? Does the harsher the natural terrain imply the stronger the impact of the pilgrimage? What differences might be observed by comparing pilgrimage that relies on walking versus pilgrimage that incorporates motor vehicles for transportation? What role might pilgrimage play in the lives of handicapped people who cannot walk? What might be the result of participating in pilgrimage multiple times over several years? Would constantly changing the path and destination create any meaningful difference concerning the power of the pilgrimage experience?

Limitations

Confounding variables for this study might have skewed the results. People who apply for a pilgrimage experience may tend to be more spiritually mature than the average Christian. Opening the pilgrimage both to clergy and to laypeople might have affected my results. Not controlling for socioeconomic status, IQ, and/or educational

level may have affected the results. The time away might have prohibited inclusion of people who work multiple jobs or have numerous children. The cost of the pilgrimage might have prohibited participation of people in lower socioeconomic classes. The participants' self-reporting may have affected the integrity of the generated data depending on the honesty of the participants concerning their personal experiences.

Reflecting back on my study, I would probably emphasize more in the application form the need for physical conditioning. FE4's feet suffered terrible blisters. She received moleskin and other soothing helps but she almost had to quit because of the pain. Increased information, however, is no guarantee that participants will arrive any more prepared.

My instrument could be improved. For example, if I asked participants to supply a numerical rating for question four on the Registration Questionnaire (see Appendix C), I could better compare participants' current awareness of and/or relationship with God immediately prior to the pilgrimage with the numerical ratings I received about participants prior six-month average rating, post-pilgrimage rating, and six-week post-pilgrimage rating. I could improve question three on both the Closing Questionnaire (see Appendix G) and the Interview Questions (see Appendix H) by leaving it completely open-ended. By supplying suggestions concerning which aspect of the pilgrimage experience rendered the greatest impact, I may have inadvertently influenced participants to think about ideas I already possessed instead of encouraging participants to generate their own ideas. Also, my instrument did not possess a true reliability or validity scale; therefore, I am limited concerning what I may claim about my results.

My data collection could be improved. I could send out the Registration Questionnaire with the application instead of subsequent to receiving the application form. This change would allow me to ask for the Registration Questionnaire to be returned prior to the participants' arrival at the trail head. I could then observe more carefully if all questions were fully answered. Thankfully, the problem of unanswered questions did not arise in any meaningful manner. I only had a few places where I asked participants to give me a numerical rating and a careful explanation for that rating only to discover later that they simply supplied the numerical rating with no further explanation.

Unexpected Observations

Even after studying and experiencing liminality in my own life, the importance of the categories of community and suffering to the participants' learning and growth surprised me. Participants expressed great passion about the impact of being together through a physically difficult experience. FE4 proclaimed this area as her greatest lesson learned. She spoke of it as a powerful tool used by God to gain her attention in an area that she already intellectually understood but experientially had resisted. Learning tends to fade the further away in time an event has occurred. Perhaps this finding creates a case for repeated pilgrimage (like the ancient Hebrew requirement) in order to keep fresh the importance of lessons learned in the liminal environment.

I marveled at the strong disconnect between participants' anticipations about the power of nature to teach (only one participant suggested the importance of nature on his application) versus the number of participants who cited nature as an important learning tool during and following the pilgrimage experience. In the midst of the walk, and also immediately after the walk, participants recognized the importance of nature in their

learning. Six weeks later, however, only half of the participants remembered nature as strongly meaningful in their pilgrimage experience. This finding suggests that disconnection from nature in North American society is strong, even for people who live in a rural setting. It also suggests that going on pilgrimage ought to occur more often to retain the lessons learned.

Finally, I marveled at the number of people who arrived anticipating one thing only to experience a completely different and unexpected outcome. FE6 thought the pilgrimage would provide an opportunity to think of solutions to some of her problems. Instead, she discovered that by *not* thinking about her problems and just letting her mind relax she found a settling of her spirit. She believed this experience was very counterintuitive but extremely interesting. In another example, FE2 at first anticipated the pilgrimage would provide a spiritual growth opportunity for her through the experience of stillness. After she had participated for about a day, she was convinced that God had called her to go on pilgrimage in order to work out her identity now that her last child had left home. On Saturday, however, she carried on a long conversation and shared prayer with FE3 during which FE2 received a powerful emotional healing concerning the suicide of her father many years earlier. She had not even thought of this issue for several weeks prior to the pilgrimage. She remains convinced that receiving healing was the primary reason God called her to experience this pilgrimage.

Recommendations

In response to what I have learned, I anticipate that an annual pilgrimage for all clergy in my United Methodist conference would be a wonderful spiritual growth opportunity for those interested. I created my project not to be limited to backpacking

because I knew if tents and camping and lack of access to showers and toilets and running water were involved, I would lose the vast majority of potential pilgrims. Nevertheless, many of the clergy in our conference could do this hike and benefit from it.

The director of the ministry department at Houghton College suggested to me recently the potential of contracting with me to run this pilgrimage event with the incoming ministerial students each September when they have just arrived. I think going on pilgrimage has great potential not only to bond the students closely due to liminality but also to ground the students in their Christian identity to help them overcome the future temptations of overwork in ministry in order to please parishioners. I believe pilgrimage could teach them an important lesson about simply *being* instead constantly *doing* in response to the pressure of the culture.

Postscript

Looking back on this project, I value the evidence this study has produced that suggests some of the things I anecdotally and intuitively believed about my own extensive pilgrimage experience actually appear to have some merit even in a much more plush and brief excursion.

I am unaware of any other person doing research on localized pilgrimage experiences similar to my ministry intervention project. I remain excited about my findings as I believe some of the insights I bring through this study are unique. I hope others will follow up my research and determine if it has long-term value.

I anticipate this research project will change my ministry in three ways. I plan to offer this pilgrimage experience to members of local congregations in western New York state on an occasional basis. I also plan to contract with Houghton College to design and

facilitate this experience for incoming ministerial students. Finally, attaining my doctorate provides me an opportunity to accept a potential invitation to a local adjunct teaching position, which an administrator from Saint Bonaventure University is hoping I will consider.

APPENDIX A

BULLETIN ANNOUNCEMENT

Go Take a Hike!

Are you stressed out with the frantic pace of life? Do you want some relief from the rat race? Then consider experiencing a spiritual pilgrimage through beautiful Letchworth State Park.

What? A **pilgrimage** is an intentional, physical journey that begins in a typical setting of the pilgrim's life and ends at a significant spiritual destination. In this case, we'll be walking the entire length of Letchworth State Park and ending up at the Abbey of the Genesee in Piffard, NY. We'll hike on park trails and roads and also the Genesee Valley Greenway trail.

Come prepared to enjoy a time of disconnection from the larger culture, immersion in a natural setting, physical exertion, freedom from family and work obligations, companions with whom to share the journey, and stops along the way involving worship and contemplation.

Who? The pilgrimage is open to 12 participants (6 men and 6 women) who are at least 18 years old and who currently live in Western New York. You must be willing to walk several miles a day and participate in group activities. The hiking terrain is not difficult and can be accomplished by anyone of moderate physical condition. Participants need to be Christians who want to grow in their relationship with God and who recognize that the busyness of life sometimes hinders spiritual growth.

When? We will gather at the southern (Portageville) entrance to Letchworth State Park at 4:00 p.m. on Thursday, May 17, 2007. We will finish right after lunch on Sunday, May 20, 2007. Participants must be present for the entire experience.

Why? This pilgrimage experience is part of a research project for a Doctor of Ministry degree being earned by Bill Allen, pastor of Christ United Methodist Church in Olean, NY. So, you're helping a poor graduate student get his degree, but more importantly, this event could transform your life in exciting ways! **Come encounter God on a spiritual journey of faith!**

Contact: To find out more information, call Bill Allen at 716-372-4514 or e-mail him at billandkristen@oleancumc.org. There is a cost of $100 to participate, but a few scholarships are available for those for whom the cost would otherwise be prohibitive.

APPENDIX B

APPLICATION FORM

Christian Pilgrimage Experience
A Research Project by Bill Allen

(Please fill out one complete application per person. Applications must be filled out in full in order to be accepted. All information will be held in strict confidence.)

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Name _____
Address _____
_____
City, State, Zip _____

Phone Office _____
Home _____
Cell _____

E-mail _____

HEALTH INFORMATION

(This information is only gathered in case you experience a medical emergency while on the pilgrimage and need to receive immediate medical assistance. This information will not be shared with anyone other than medical personnel who are assisting you.)

Health Insurance Company _____
Health Insurance ID # _____
Primary Care Physician (name & phone) _____
Medications _____
_____
Allergies _____
_____
Emergency Contact: Name _____
Phone _____

WAIVER

Please read and sign the following:

I accept and understand that walking along trails and roadsides is an activity that involves a risk of injury or death. I am fully responsible for my own safety during this pilgrimage experience, and I take full responsibility for all activities in which I participate. I will not hold Bill Allen, Asbury Theological Seminary, or Christ United Methodist Church liable for any injuries. All information I have disclosed on this form is truthful and complete.

Signature _____ Date _____

SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS

FOOD—Do you have any special food requirements? Please specify so that we can work together to accommodate your needs while menu planning.

OTHER—Do you have any other special requirements in order to participate in this pilgrimage experience? Please specify so that we can work together to accommodate your needs.

PAYMENT

The cost of this pilgrimage experience is $100. Please enclose a check for $100 made out to **William A. Allen** which has the word "Pilgrimage" written on the memo line. Couples may write one check for both persons.

For those individuals requesting a scholarship to help defray costs, please submit a check for whatever amount you can afford to pay. If you are unable to pay any amount, please indicate this by writing "No Check Submitted—Scholarship" on the bottom of this form. If you are able to pay in full, please do so as scholarships are limited.

Due to certain limitations only six men and six women are able to participate in this pilgrimage experience. The first six men and the first six women whose fully completed applications have been received will reserve spaces on the pilgrimage. All subsequently received fully completed applications will be placed on a waiting list in the order in which they are received. You will be notified immediately by e-mail as to whether you have a space reserved on the pilgrimage or whether you are on the waiting list. Should anyone decide to remove themselves from the pilgrimage, people on the waiting list will be offered a space in the order in which their applications were received. Anyone who is unable to participate in the pilgrimage will have their application check returned to them.

EXPECTATIONS OF PILGRIMAGE PARTICIPANTS

Participants must be present for the entire pilgrimage experience. Participants who have submitted a fully completed application will receive an initial questionnaire in the mail just prior to the pilgrimage experience. This questionnaire must be fully completed and returned to Bill Allen on the first day of the pilgrimage. It is crucial that this questionnaire be completed before the pilgrimage begins.

On the final day of the pilgrimage, participants will receive a second questionnaire. This second questionnaire must be fully completed and submitted to Bill Allen prior to leaving the pilgrimage experience.

Approximately six weeks after the pilgrimage has ended, Bill Allen will conduct an interview with each participant at an agreed-upon location. This interview is a required follow-up to the pilgrimage experience.

Please read and sign the following statement:

I have read the above information concerning the expectations of pilgrimage participants. I agree to fully participate by being present for the entire pilgrimage experience (from Thursday, May 17, 2007, 4:00 p.m. to Sunday, May 20, 2007, 1:00 p.m. PM), by filling out and submitting the initial questionnaire prior to the pilgrimage, by filling out and submitting the second questionnaire subsequent to the pilgrimage, and by agreeing to be interviewed by Bill Allen approximately six weeks subsequent to the end of the pilgrimage.

Signature _____ Date _____

LOGISTICS

When and Where—Gather at the southern entrance (in Portageville, NY, *not* the Parade Grounds entrance) to Letchworth State Park (Rt. 19A) at 4:00 p.m. on Thursday, May 17, 2007. We will finish right after lunch on Sunday, May 20, 2007. Your car will be moved by volunteers to the Abbey on Thursday.

Shelter—We will be staying in cabins in Letchworth State Park and at a guest house at the Abbey of the Genesee. All facilities have electricity and access to bathrooms, running water, and showers.

Linens—Bring a pillow and either sheets (twin) and blankets, or a sleeping bag, as well as a towel and washcloth.

Day Pack—Bring a small day pack/book bag that you will feel comfortable carrying throughout the day. It should big enough for a lunch, a water bottle, and maps. You will not be required to carry your clothing, food, bedding, etc.

Food—All food will be provided, including Thursday supper and Sunday lunch. Participants will prepare their own meals including sack lunches for during their hikes. Logistical helpers will offer water to hikers at various points along the trail.

Hiking—Each person will be allowed to hike at his/her own pace. Sometimes you will hike with a partner. **Arrive prepared to hike at 4:00 p.m. on Thursday.**

Clothing—Pack comfortable hiking clothes, warmer clothes for the evening, and rain gear of your choice (jacket, poncho, or even an umbrella are all fine). You will have access to your suitcase each morning and evening. We will hike no matter what the weather (unless it is dangerous). Wear shoes/boots/sneakers that are comfortable.

Suitcase—Please fit all your belongings (except for pillow and bedding) into one suitcase. You will pack all your supplies each morning in order for them to be transported to our next shelter. For the most part, you will not have access to anything throughout the day other than what you carry in your day pack.

Directions—Maps and hiking directions will be supplied each day.

Electronic Devices—Please leave radios, i-pods, laptops, PDAs, etc. at home. **You can bring a cell phone, but please only carry it to use in an emergency.**

CONTACT INFORMATION

For any additional questions or comments please feel free to contact Bill Allen at any time. My address is 1613 Stardust Lane, Olean, NY, 14760. My phone is 716-372-3495 (office) and 716-372-4514 (home). E-mail is billandkristen@oleancumc.org.

APPENDIX C

REGISTRATION QUESTIONNAIRE

Please spend some time thinking carefully about your answers to these questions. Please use separate sheets of paper to record your answers to these questions. Thank you for your time and effort in responding. All answers will remain strictly confidential. **Please bring this completed questionnaire with you to the pilgrimage.**

Preliminary Information:
Name _____
Gender _____
Age _____
Occupation _____
Marital status _____
Do you have children living with you at this time? _____
Are you a clergyperson or a layperson? _____
How many years have you been a Christian? _____

1. Think of a Christian you greatly admire and describe that person.

2. In what ways are you like or unlike the person you just described?

3. On a scale of 1-10 (1 = being totally separated, 10 = being totally connected) rate your relationship with God over the last 6 months (give an average rating for that time period) and carefully explain why you gave yourself this rating.

4. How would you describe your current awareness of God and/or relationship with God?

5. Describe how you believe this pilgrimage experience will shape your awareness of God and/or your relationship with God.

6. List the five most important roles which you would use to identify yourself.

7. Describe how the five roles you just chose (in the previous question) influence how you choose to spend your time.

8. Describe a stressful experience in the last four weeks.

9. Describe your self-care practices in terms of days off, vacations, rest, exercise, sleep, diet, etc.

10. Describe the major stressors in your life.

11. On a scale of 1-10 (1 = not being stressed at all, 10 = being excessively stressed), rate your average stress level over the last 6 months and carefully explain why you gave yourself this rating.

12. How would you describe your current level of stress?

APPENDIX D

INITIAL DAILY GATHERINGS

Thursday Afternoon

Set Up and Greeting

- 3 p.m.—be on site one hour early to connect with drivers and greet participants
- Transfer suitcases and bedding to logistics vans
- Make sure pilgrims have backpacks
- Key bag and keys to drivers—send drivers off to Abbey
- Small rocks set up on Letchworth sign
- Communion elements, stole, snacks, water, maps all ready for distribution

Welcome

- Form a standing circle with participants, two logistics helpers, and me
- Tell Texas billionaire joke—"I want to know who got me into this?"
- Pilgrimage a long time in the planning—1 ½ years before at Abbey in KY—five days of silence and prayer—pilgrimage idea born
- Doctoral research project—requirement for graduation, supposed to help Christians grow, I wanted it to be interactive and fun
- Appalachian Trail experience
    - Powerfully transformative in my life
    - I let go of lots of fears and stress
    - My prayer life was changed for the better
    - I realized it was a spiritual pilgrimage

Pilgrimage

- One definition—An intentional, physical journey beginning in a typical setting of the pilgrim's life and ending at a meaningful, spiritual destination.—We are starting in a state park and ending in a monastic community.
- Pilgrimage—a living metaphor for the greater spiritual journey of life
- Comes from Latin "*peregrinus*"—stranger, sojourner, alien
    - A person who leaves familiar comforts behind
    - A pilgrim's new home = the journey itself
    - For a Christian
        - Pilgrimage starts with baptism
        - Pilgrimage is following Jesus in the way of the cross
        - This world is not our home—be definition, a Christian is a pilgrim

Meet Your Fellow Pilgrims

- Some of you have never met anyone here, some are long time friends
- Share name, where you live, church you attend, job, and favorite ice cream

Logistics for Today's Hike

- You'll see lots of people in the park—that's perfectly fine—this is not a solitary wilderness experience
- Bathrooms at Middle Falls and Inspiration Point
- Hike alone today
    - Give yourself the gift of alone time today
    - Open your senses to God
    - Frustration and joy are both legitimate—just let it happen
- Arrive by 7:15 p.m. for supper
- Maps—hand out and go over so that everyone is clear about four mile hike today
- Pick up snacks and water when you leave

Communion—Lord's Supper

- Ask and discuss, "What are some ideas you think about during communion?"
    - Community
    - Confession
    - Celebration (Eucharist)
    - Modes (intinction)
    - Sustenance
- Early Church—"*viaticum*"—Latin meaning food (provision) for the journey of life
    - Daily bread
    - We cannot survive without God's help
    - Food for the journey into the next life
        - How much of our identity do we retain in the next life?
        - Who are we now and who will we be then?
- Consecrate elements and serve communion to the group
- Prayer Circle
    - Everyone holds hands in circle
    - Everyone encouraged but not pressured to pray out loud—squeeze the next person's hand if you are praying silently

Leaving on Pilgrimage

- Pick up snacks and water
- Set out one at a time—give space between you and the previous pilgrim
- Walk to the Letchworth sign and choose a small rock on the shelf
    - The rock represents your life on the journey
    - Keep the rock until the end—don't lose it!
- Take time to thank God for this pilgrimage experience and your life pilgrimage
- When you have taken your rock and prayed, move past the sign and begin your pilgrimage experience

Friday Morning

Gathering—following 8 a.m. breakfast

Song—"We are Grateful"—Bill plays guitar

Thoughts for the Day

- God has created a world which is constantly in flux—always changing
- God's plan = always a process of movement toward fulfillment
    - God started this world to grow us to maturity in relationship with God and others
    - God started this world to ultimately end it—bring it to fulfillment—when Jesus comes again
    - Pilgrimage and journeying are all over the Bible
        - Abram—to the promised land
        - Hebrew exodus—to the promised land
        - Babylonian captivity—to the promised land
    - We are pilgrims—not of this world—following Jesus
- Tell parable "Now" by Theophane (50)—You are on the journey right now!
- Appalachian Trail story—14 states, beautiful views, great hostels and towns—easily sucked in
    - All the crazy places I slept on that trip
        - Steps of a laundry mat
        - Between rows in a cornfield
        - Bath house by a lake
        - Campground bathroom
        - Police station
        - Tent
        - Shelters
        - Hostels
        - Motels
        - People's homes
    - I always knew that the trail was only my temporary home; my permanent home lay beyond the journey

Hand out Scripture sheet—Hebrews 11:8-16 (Appendix E)

- Take some time to look at this today
- Contemplate the questions
- We will talk about it tonight

Logistics

- Hike as you wish (alone, partner, group)
- Questions on maps and directions
- Arrive at cabins by 5 p.m.

Prayer Circle—everyone invited but not pressured to pray

Saturday Morning

Gathering—following 8 a.m. breakfast

Song—"Gonna Keep On Walkin' Forward"—Bill plays guitar

Thoughts for the Day

- Appalachian Trail
  - One of the best lessons I learned was that hiking did not provide me the time to think through my angst, anxiety, problems, worries, etc.
  - Instead, hiking provided me with the perspective that God was able to help me handle anything that might happen each day.
  - Story of "Busting Cobwebs"—entry in a trail journal
    - First person on the trail busts all the cobwebs between the trees
    - God cleared my mind of all the cobwebs—gave me a great sense of peace
- Psalms of Ascent—Psalms 120-134
  - Ascent = to go up—Hebrew "*alah*" = stairs or steps
  - Short memorable psalms—probably sung
  - Used by Jewish pilgrims on the road
  - Three times a year, devout Jews were required (unless too infirm, unclean, or detained) to drop everything, leave all tasks uncompleted, and travel to Jerusalem to worship God at the Temple
    - Passover—(spring)—Exodus—God delivers Israel from Egypt
    - Pentecost—(early summer)—focus on renewing Israel's commitments as the covenant people of God
    - Tabernacles—(autumn)—thanksgiving for the harvest

Hand out Scripture sheet—Psalms 121, 122, 127 (Appendix E)

- Take some time to look at this today
- Contemplate the questions
- We will talk about it tonight

Logistics

- Hike as you wish (alone, partner, group)
- Questions on maps and directions
- Arrive at Abbey guest house by 5 p.m.

Prayer Circle—everyone invited but not pressured to pray

Sunday Morning

There was only one daily gathering on Sunday morning which is better classified as an Ending Daily Gathering (Appendix F).

APPENDIX E

DAILY SCRIPTURES

Thursday Evening

Scripture—Genesis 12:1-9 (NLT)

Then the LORD told Abram, "Leave your country, your relatives, and your father's house, and go to the land that I will show you.

I will cause you to become the father of a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and I will make you a blessing to others.

I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. All the families of the earth will be blessed through you."

So Abram departed as the LORD had instructed him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran.

He took his wife, Sarai, his nephew Lot, and all his wealth—his livestock and all the people who had joined his household at Haran—and finally arrived in Canaan.

Traveling through Canaan, they came to a place near Shechem and set up camp beside the oak at Moreh. At that time, the area was inhabited by Canaanites.

Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "I am going to give this land to your offspring." And Abram built an altar there to commemorate the LORD's visit.

After that, Abram traveled southward and set up camp in the hill country between Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar and worshiped the LORD.

Then Abram traveled south by stages toward the Negev.

Thoughts:

- The Hebrew word *halak*, which is translated "leave" and "go" in this passage, also is translated "walk."
- What does Abram know? What doesn't he know?
- How does Abram's obedience affect others?
- What does Abram accomplish and/or produce?
- How do you think Abram would have defined himself? How do you define yourself?

Friday Morning

Scripture—Hebrews 11:8-16 (NLT)

It was by faith that Abraham obeyed when God called him to leave home and go to another land that God would give him as his inheritance. He went without knowing where he was going.

And even when he reached the land God promised him, he lived there by faith—for he was like a foreigner, living in a tent. And so did Isaac and Jacob, to whom God gave the same promise.

Abraham did this because he was confidently looking forward to a city with eternal foundations, a city designed and built by God.

It was by faith that Sarah together with Abraham was able to have a child, even though they were too old and Sarah was barren. Abraham believed that God would keep his promise.

And so a whole nation came from this one man, Abraham, who was too old to have any children—a nation with so many people that, like the stars of the sky and the sand on the seashore, there is no way to count them.

All these faithful ones died without receiving what God had promised them, but they saw it all from a distance and welcomed the promises of God. They agreed that they were no more than foreigners and nomads here on earth.

And obviously people who talk like that are looking forward to a country they can call their own.

If they had meant the country they came from, they would have found a way to go back.

But they were looking for a better place, a heavenly homeland. That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a heavenly city for them.

Thoughts:

- What do you think "home" meant to Abraham? What does "home" mean to you?
- How do "journeying" and "home" interact?
- Where do you think you really belong?

Saturday Morning

Scripture—Psalms 121, 122, 127 (NLT)

Psalm 121:1

A song for the ascent to Jerusalem.

I look up to the mountains—does my help come from there?

My help comes from the LORD, who made the heavens and the earth!

He will not let you stumble and fall; the one who watches over you will not sleep.

Indeed, he who watches over Israel never tires and never sleeps.

The LORD himself watches over you! The LORD stands beside you as your protective shade.

The sun will not hurt you by day, nor the moon at night.

The LORD keeps you from all evil and preserves your life.

The LORD keeps watch over you as you come and go, both now and forever.

Psalm 122:1

A song for the ascent to Jerusalem. A psalm of David.

I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD."

And now we are standing here inside your gates, O Jerusalem.

Jerusalem is a well-built city, knit together as a single unit.

All the people of Israel—the LORD's people—make their pilgrimage here. They come to give thanks to the name of the LORD as the law requires.

Here stand the thrones where judgment is given, the thrones of the dynasty of David.

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. May all who love this city prosper.

O Jerusalem, may there be peace within your walls and prosperity in your palaces.

For the sake of my family and friends, I will say, “Peace be with you.”

For the sake of the house of the LORD our God, I will seek what is best for you, O Jerusalem.

Psalm 127:1

A song for the ascent to Jerusalem. A psalm of Solomon.

Unless the LORD builds a house, the work of the builders is useless. Unless the LORD protects a city, guarding it with sentries will do no good.

It is useless for you to work so hard from early morning until late at night, anxiously working for food to eat; for God gives rest to his loved ones.

Children are a gift from the LORD; they are a reward from him.

Children born to a young man are like sharp arrows in a warrior’s hands.

How happy is the man whose quiver is full of them! He will not be put to shame when he confronts his accusers at the city gates.

Thoughts:

- Where do you see journeying in the Psalms?
- Where do you see yourself in the Psalms?
- How are these Psalms the songs of pilgrims?
- What would it be like to leave everything behind in order to do a multiday spiritual pilgrimage three times a year?

Sunday Morning

Scripture—John 1:14; 1 John 3:1-2 (NLT)

John 1:14

So the Word became human and lived here on earth among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father.

1 John 3:1-2

See how very much our heavenly Father loves us, for he allows us to be called his children, and we really are! But the people who belong to this world don’t know God, so they don’t understand that we are his children.

Yes, dear friends, we are already God’s children, and we can’t even imagine what we will be like when Christ returns. But we do know that when he comes we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is.

Thoughts:

- How is God moving toward fulfillment in the Scriptures above?
- How does your definition of yourself interact with God’s definition of you?
- In light of the Scriptures above, what do you think it means to be human?

APPENDIX F

ENDING DAILY GATHERINGS

Thursday Evening

Gathering

- Following dinner and settling into cabins
- We met around a campfire by one of the cabins

Songs—Bill plays guitar

- Pour Out Your Spirit, Lord
- Walk with Me

Discussion

- How was your walk today?
    - Good moments
    - Frustrations
    - Stories

Hand Out Scripture Sheet

- Genesis 12:1-9—this was read out loud
- Kilian McDonnell—"The Call of Abraham" (10)—I read this poem out loud and the group discussed the poem and the Scripture passage
- I shared these thoughts and questions which the group further discussed
    - What does Abram Know? What doesn't Abram know?
    - How does Abram's obedience affect others?
    - What does Abram accomplish or produce?
    - How do you think Abram would have defined himself?
    - How do you define yourself?
    - Hebrew word "*halak*," which is translated "leave" or "go" in this passage, also is translated "walk."
    - Abram leaves behind everything and starts a pilgrimage that lasts the rest of his life—lives in tents
    - Yet seems to set down some roots in Canaan
        - travels all over the land—enters it in stages
        - builds altars to God throughout the land
        - later in Genesis 23 Abram buys land in Hebron for a burial site
    - God's communication—go, promise, promise (and "go" is almost last word, too)
    - Human response—journey, journey, journey
    - God's command to the pivotal person whose obedience will eventually bless the whole world (through the coming of the Messiah) is—"Walk"
- Anything else for the good of the group?

Logistics

- Relax and do as you please—talk, enjoy company, alone time, etc.
- Quiet time by 10 p.m. tonight
- Breakfast tomorrow at 8 a.m.

Song—"Good Night, Good Night, Good Night"—Bill plays guitar

Friday Evening

Gathering

- Following dinner and settling into cabins
- We met around a campfire by one of the cabins

Songs—Bill plays guitar

- "I Am a Pizza"
- "We Are Marching in the Light of God"
- "Now I Walk in Beauty"

Discussion

- How is it with your soul?
    - John Wesley's question that Methodists were asked weekly
    - We went around the circle and everyone shared
- What made an impression on you today?—each pilgrim shared thoughts
- Tell parable "Together" by Theophane (54)—discuss

Scripture Sheets

- Hebrews 11:8-16—this passage was read out loud
- I shared these thoughts and questions, which the group further discussed
    - What do you think "home" meant to Abraham? What does "home" mean to you?
    - How do "journeying" and "home" interact?
    - Where do you think you really belong?
    - Where is the movement/progression in this passage?
    - Where is there identity/self-understanding in this passage?
        - People—see Philippians 3:20—citizenship is in heaven
        - God—not ashamed to be called the people's God
        - God proclaims his identity as the God of the pilgrims—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
        - See Exodus 3:14—God calls himself "I AM" not "I do"
    - Hebrews considers the patriarchs
        - Foreigners, nomads, aliens—living in tents
        - People who did not consider their original homes or even the promised land their home but who looked forward to a heavenly home
    - What did you have time to do today?

    - How do we refer to time?
        - Spend time, save time, make time, invest your time, time management, time is money
        - We often speak of time in consumeristic ways – like money
    - Abraham had time to linger in the promised land, move through it, explore it, pass the time at holy places, build altars, pitch his tent, and call on the name of the Lord.
- Anything else for the good of the group?

Logistics
- Relax and do as you please—talk, enjoy company, alone time, etc.
- Quiet time by 10 p.m. tonight
- Breakfast tomorrow at 8 a.m.

Song—"Good Night, Good Night, Good Night"—Bill plays guitar

Saturday Evening

Gathering
- Following dinner and settling into Abbey guest house
- We met in living room of guest house

Welcome from Monk—Father Jerome welcomed us and spent some time explaining the history and purpose of monasticism. He then departed.

Songs—Bill plays guitar
- "I Will Not a Hearer Only Be"
- "Walk with Me"

Discussion
- What were your God moments today?
- What were your frustrations today?
- What was your biggest thought/impression/story from today?

Scripture Sheets
- Psalms 121, 122, 127—these passages were read out loud
- I shared these thoughts and questions, which the group further discussed
    - How do you respond to these Scriptures?
    - Where do you see journeying in these Psalms?
    - Where do you see yourself in these Psalms?
    - How are these Psalms the songs of the pilgrims?
    - What would it be like to leave everything behind in order to do a multiday spiritual pilgrimage three times a year?
        - Passover—celebrate Exodus event
        - Pentecost—renewing Israelites' commitments as covenant people of God

        - Tabernacles—celebrate blessings of harvest (lived in temporary shelters or booths)
    - Tourist Mind-set
        - Immediate gratification
        - Little or no sacrifice
        - Done when the tourist has adequate leisure
    - Pilgrim Mind-set
        - Devotion and sacrifice
        - Stop normal activities and respond to will of God
        - Going to God on the path of Jesus Christ (Thomas—We don't know where you are going so how can we know the way/road? Jesus responds—I am the <u>way</u>—John 14:6)
    - "The Problem is Heaviness"—Theophane (79)—I read this story, and the group discussed what was heavy in their lives.

Logistics

- Proposal for tonight (optional)
    - I suggested the pilgrims may want to attend one of the early worship options with the monks
        - 2:25 a.m.—Vigils
        - 6:00 a.m.—Lauds
    - I offered a ride to each service and also encouraged them to walk the 1 ½ miles to and from the Abbey if they preferred.
- I asked them to maintain silence starting at 2:25 a.m. until our final gathering the next morning at 9:30 a.m.
- Tonight—do as you please, relax, sleep, converse, read, etc.
- Breakfast—optional—self-serve—whenever you want before 9:30 a.m.
- Final Gathering—9:30 a.m.—bring your rock that you carried throughout the journey

Song—"Good Night, Good Night, Good Night"—Bill plays guitar

<u>Sunday Morning</u>

Gathering

- Starting at 9:30 a.m. following an optional, self-serve breakfast
- We met in living room of guest house

Songs—Bill plays guitar

- "The River of God"
- "We Are Grateful"
- "Pour Out Your Spirit, Lord"
- "Walk with Me"

Pilgrimage Recap

- Remember that one definition of pilgrimage?—An intentional, physical journey beginning in a typical setting of the pilgrim's life and ending at a meaningful, spiritual destination.
- Close your eyes and remember this experience
    - On Thursday
        - You began at the south end of Letchworth State Park
        - Strange people drove your car away
        - Communion
        - Choosing your rock
        - Walking alone
        - Trestle
        - Falls
        - Cabins
        - Campfire and songs
        - A good group discussion
    - On Friday
        - More views of the gorge
        - Wolf Creek Falls
        - Long grassy road walks
        - Trails that were overgrown
        - A really steep hill
        - A campfire that had to be moved
        - A good group discussion
    - On Saturday
        - Blisters to be addressed
        - A Civil War reenactment
        - A large dam
        - A tiny railroad bridge to squeeze under
        - A really long, flat trail bed
        - Wonderful water
        - A beautiful old mansion
        - A talkative monk
        - A good group discussion
    - On Sunday
        - Worshipping in the middle of the night
        - Worshipping in the early morning
        - Monks who sing their prayers
        - Breakfast (or not)
        - Rest
        - A closing time together

Discussion

- You have carried your rock—represents your journey—hold it while you share
    - How did you find the whole monastery experience? How was it similar or different than what you expected?

  - How did suffering play a role in this pilgrimage experience? What impact did suffering have in this pilgrimage experience?
  - What is one nugget you have gotten—good or bad, easy or difficult, etc.?

Scripture Sheet

- John 1:14 and 1 John 3:1-2
- I shared these thoughts and questions which the group further discussed
  - How is God moving toward fulfillment in the Scriptures above?
  - How does your definition of yourself interact with God's definition of you?
  - In light of the Scriptures above, what do you think it means to be human?
  - In John 1:1—the Word is God. In John 1:14—the Word becomes flesh. God journeys into an existence that also includes being human.
  - The Word (Jesus) took the path to connect with people in order that people might take the path to reconnect with God.
  - Incarnation
    - Ultimate pilgrimage
    - Purpose—to reconnect people with God
    - Ultimate meaning and purpose of pilgrimage = to help people become more godly.
    - Pilgrimage, at its core, when initiated and supported by God, helps draw the pilgrim into a movement towards fulfillment to become godly in nature.
    - Pilgrims are drawn into God's greater movement towards fulfillment that God started at the beginning of time and will not complete until the end of time.

You Are Pilgrims

- "Excuses"—Theophane (86)—How might you struggle with excuses once you return to your "normal life"?
- Pilgrim = NOT a Tourist
  - You didn't come to be coddled, to avoid sacrifice
  - Latin "*peregrinus*"—stranger, sojourner, alien—this world is not your home
  - At your core you are
    - A child of God
    - A citizen of heaven
    - A pilgrim

Communion

- Move outside onto the lawn of the guest house—stand in circle
- Early Church called communion the Latin word "*viaticum*" = food for the journey
- On this trip, your provisions were provided, and we all made it!
- "Give us this day our daily bread" is the only part of the Lord's prayer that asks for physical sustenance
- We cannot survive without provisions, sustenance, God's help

- *Viaticum*—food for the journey
    - The journey of this pilgrimage experience
    - But now—the journey of the rest of this life
        - What will your journey look like?
        - Will you pass the time with God?
        - Do you know who you really are at the core?
    - Eventually—the journey into eternity—100 year test
- We then partake of communion

Remembering Your Baptism

- Logistics—standing outside on the lawn of the guest house
    - There is a beautiful stone walkway which goes out to an ending point where a large bowl of water has been placed
    - This exercise is a rite of passage event designed to disengage the pilgrims from the liminal pilgrimage experience and reintroduce them back into "normal life"
- Say—Christian pilgrimage starts with baptism
    - Following Jesus in the way of the cross
    - By definition, a Christian is a pilgrim
    - Live into your core identity of being a pilgrim by the choices you make concerning how you live your life each day
    - There is a bowl of water placed at the end of this walkway
    - One by one we will go down this walkway and feel the water in the bowl
        - As you feel the water remember that at your baptism God put his mark on you, tattooed you, claimed you as his own, marked you as a Christian, whether infant or adult
        - Thank God for your identity
        - Wash your pilgrimage rock in that bowl
        - As you immerse your rock, surrender your life again to God
        - Immerse your life in God's grace
        - Own in your heart how precious water is, especially after the heat of yesterday's walk
        - You may leave your rock in the bowl as a sign of your surrender or you may keep your rock as a tangible memory of this pilgrimage
    - When you leave the bowl and return to this circle, your pilgrimage has officially come to an end

Logistics

- Lunch is self-serve immediately following our prayer circle
- Car keys are on the front table; cars are parked behind barn
- Please fill out a closing questionnaire before your leave
- Don't forget to say your goodbyes

Prayer Circle

- Everyone is invited by not pressured to pray
- Group hug!

- Final blessing from Bill—“The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine upon you. The Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon you and give you peace. And may the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be upon you and remain with you always. Amen. Go in peace!”

APPENDIX G

CLOSING QUESTIONNAIRE

Please spend some time thinking carefully about your answers to these questions. Please use separate sheets of paper to record your answers to these questions. Thank you for your time and effort in responding. All answers will remain strictly confidential. **Please hand in this completed questionnaire before you depart today.**

Name: _____

1. On a scale of 1-10 (1 = being totally separated, 10 = being totally connected) rate your current relationship with God and carefully explain why you gave yourself this rating.

2. Describe how you believe this pilgrimage experience has shaped your awareness of God and/or your relationship with God.

3. Which aspect of this pilgrimage experience (nature, physical exertion, fellow pilgrims, worship, Scripture, communion, discussions, alone time, etc.) had the greatest impact on your awareness of and/or relationship with God? Please explain your answer.

4. How do you think this pilgrimage experience will impact your choices regarding how you spend your time?

5. What did you learn about yourself through this pilgrimage experience?

6. List the five most important roles you would use to identify yourself.

7. Describe how the five roles you just chose (in the previous question) will influence how you choose to spend your time.

8. Describe at what point you felt you were able to disengage from your normal responsibilities and become fully engaged in the pilgrimage experience, and explain your answer.

9. How do you think this pilgrimage experience will impact your self-care practices in terms of days off, vacations, rest, exercise, sleep, diet, etc.?

10. On a scale of 1-10 (1 = not being stressed at all, 10 = being excessively stressed), rate your current stress level and carefully explain why you gave yourself this rating.

11. How do you think this pilgrimage experience will impact your future stress levels?

APPENDIX H

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Name: _____

1. On a scale of 1-10 (1 = being totally separated, 10 = being totally connected) rate your current relationship with God and carefully explain why you gave yourself this rating.

2. Describe how you believe this pilgrimage experience has shaped your awareness of God and/or your relationship with God.

3. Which aspect of this pilgrimage experience (nature, physical exertion, fellow pilgrims, worship, Scripture, communion, discussions, alone time, etc.) had the greatest impact on your awareness of and/or relationship with God? Please explain your answer.

4. How do you think this pilgrimage experience will impact your choices regarding how you spend your time?

5. What did you learn about yourself through this pilgrimage experience?

6. List the five most important roles you would use to identify yourself.

7. Describe how the five roles you just chose (in the previous question) will influence how you choose to spend your time.

8. How do you think this pilgrimage experience will impact your self-care practices in terms of days off, vacations, rest, exercise, sleep, diet, etc.?

9. On a scale of 1-10 (1 = not being stressed at all, 10 = being excessively stressed), rate your current stress level and carefully explain why you gave yourself this rating.

10. How do you think this pilgrimage experience will impact your future stress levels?

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